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CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

IT'S WAR!

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*And Black Panther: meet him inside...

+ IRVINE WELSH RELIVES TRAINSPOTTING: "I ASKED TO BE IN A SEX SCENE"
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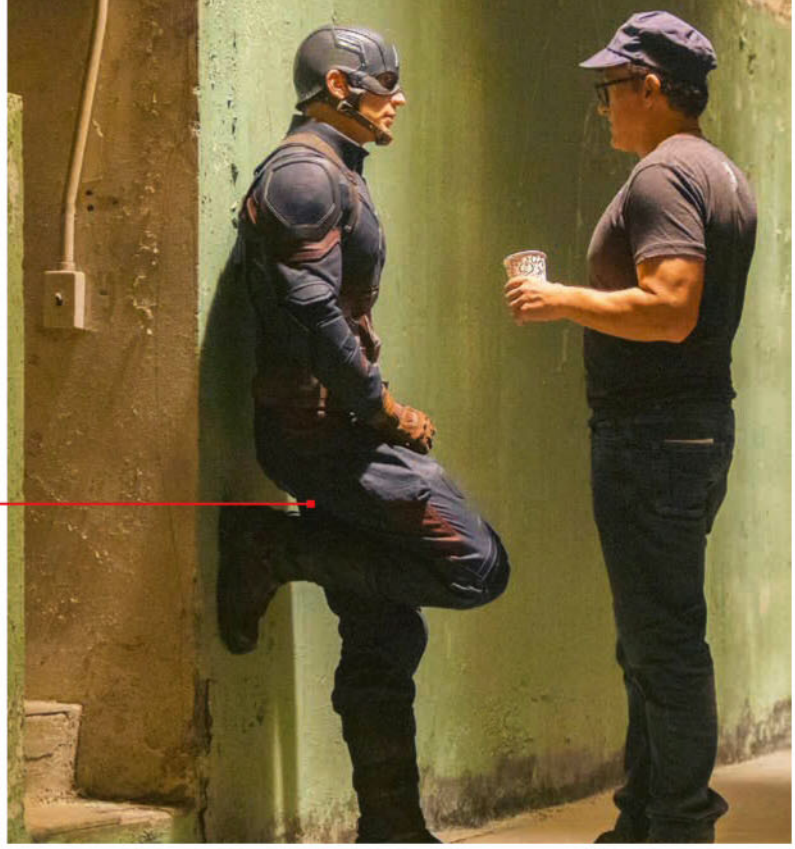
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Left: Not seen *The Force Awakens* yet? You're in the minority — beware of spoilers on page 98...

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"DONNIE YEN CONTINUES TO SHOWCASE WHY HE'S THE BEST ACTION STAR WORKING TODAY."

- Examiner.com

"FANS OF OLD-SCHOOL KUNG FU WILL EAT UP THE ROCK-SOLID, JOINT-SNAPPING FIGHTS IN IP MAN 3"

- Variety

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Credits

MAY 2016

FOR WHATEVER REASON, THERE'S ALWAYS BEEN A BIT OF A critical sneer at "comic book movies", as though they're not [*use huffy pretentious voice*] serious cinema. The same used to be true of animated movies too, until Pixar muscled their way into Best Picture contention in back-to-back years. But how long can it be until that mindset changes when they're just so good — and *Captain America: Civil War* could be the movie to move the bar to the next level.

The third Captain America movie delivers a level of complexity and character, married to eye-popping spectacle, that defined the golden age of cinema: *Ben-Hur*, *Cleopatra*, *The Guns Of Navarone*. But none of those had Spider-Man! Thwip!

Too much? Am I too excitable? It's possible: this is a pretty damn exciting year for movie fans, with a slew of can't-wait blockbusters — *Ghostbusters*! *Suicide Squad*! *Rogue One*! — and future classics — *Everybody Wants Some!!*! *Sing Street*! — heading right for us… The sheer anticipation is threatening to turn my noggin into a super-heated skull-bowl of rendered brain-fat.

Of course, this is my first issue of *Empire* Australasia, so there's another reason I'm feeling excitable. It's a thrill and an honour to join the *Empire* team, and we're all just geared up to be the best magazine we can be. Exhibit one: we've simply ignored the harassed howls of the production team who have to figure how to assemble this word-origami, and put more glorious posters in this issue, and every issue for the rest of the year. Ideal for hiding the tunnel in your cell wall. Also, consider my hat firmly tipped to outgoing editor Dan "Young Homer*" Murphy who captained the good ship *Empire* faithfully and well. May all your Pragmatics gigs be packed with groupies, and an open bar.

Please switch your phones to silent,



EDITOR
TIM KEEN

*This really is his nickname. Call him this if you see him.



MEGA-POSTER PART 3 RETURNS DUE TO TRIMMING WOES!

So, we printed a giant *Star Wars* poster in four parts. And then we stuffed one of the parts up. Damn it.
No need to burn down your house (or ours) in rage. Just follow these steps:

1. **Turn to page 98.**
2. **Carefully extract your poster along the perforated strip.**
4. **Assemble using adhesive of your choice in location of choice.**
5. **Enjoy. Missed any quarters? Go to www.magshop.com.au/empire-back-issues to order previous issues online.**

EMPIRE

(...and our favourite "War" movie)

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DEMOLITION



Jake Gyllenhaal shines alongside Naomi Watts in Jean-Marc Vallée's darkly comic drama about a man attempting to rebuild his life after the devastating loss of his wife.

EVERYBODY WANTS SOME!!!



Richard Linklater's follow-up to *Boyhood* (SFF 2014) is an infectiously funny 'spiritual sequel' to his cult classic *Dazed and Confused* about college kids in the early '80s.

MAGGIE'S PLAN



Greta Gerwig, Ethan Hawke and Julianne Moore star in this witty New York comedy about modern relationships from writer-director Rebecca Miller (*The Private Lives of Pippa Lee,* SFF 2009).

MUSTANG



Winner of a Cannes Directors' Fortnight, six Césars and an Oscar nomination, this Turkish gem is a powerful portrait of sisterhood.

SUNSET SONG



Legendary British director Terence Davies offers a richly cinematic take on a classic of Scottish literature, starring model turned actress Agyness Deyn and Peter Mullan.

MAGALLANES



This suspenseful political thriller reaches deep into Peru's long-troubled history to tell a moving tale of a man's quest for redemption.

MORRIS FROM AMERICA



Winner of the Sundance Screenwriting Award, this is a fresh, funny film about how a shy African-American teen who relocates to Germany deals with culture shock and first love.

SING STREET



John Carney's latest is a beguiling portrait of '80s Dublin, complete with stone-washed denim, wild haircuts and a nostalgic soundtrack of The Cure, Duran Duran and The Police.

JANIS: LITTLE GIRL BLUE



Uncompromising rocker Janis Joplin, as you've never known her before: an eye-opening documentary featuring unseen footage, private letters and interviews with band members.

LO AND BEHOLD: REVERIES OF THE CONNECTED WORLD



Werner Herzog, director of such beloved classics of the non-fiction realm as *Grizzly Man* and *Cave of Forgotten Dreams,* turns his inimitable eye on the evolution of the Internet.

UNDER THE SHADOW



In war-torn Tehran, an evil entity invades the apartment of a mother and her young daughter. Babak Anvari's debut combines scary supernatural suspense and potent cultural commentary.

ESSENTIAL SCORSESE: SELECTED BY DAVID STRATTON



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LETTER of the MONTH

BEN *HUH?*

I just watched the trailer for the 2016 remake of *Ben-Hur*. Cecil B. DeMille must be turning in his grave: Morgan Freeman with dreadlocks! Inane dialogue ("Are we having fun now, brother?", "Chariot racing is a blood sport", "In the arena there is no law.")! I didn't see any tatts or piercings – they must be saving them for the full feature. What is wrong with Hollywood?

BRIAN COLTON, PICCADILLY SA

You may scoff, Brian, but* Empire *is pleased to reveal that we've just sold our pitch for* Gone With The Wind 2: Gone Harder *to Hollywood for $10 million (it's basically the first movie but with lasers and dinosaurs, but who cares – we're rich now!)



EVERY letter printed this month scores a Blu-ray of John le Carré thriller *The Night Manager*, starring Loki and House.

STAR FLAWS

Dear Sir/Madam/Sith Lord, I have been looking forward to completing my *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* four-piece poster, and was extremely disappointed to see that the posters didn't line up and it sent my OCD into hyperdrive. I have been a long time supporter/purchaser of *Empire* for over five years now and I'm worried that the Sith are finally taking over the universe, one magazine at a time. Please don't send a squadron of stormtroopers to destroy me.

JOSH LANGFORD, VIA EMAIL

Fear not, Josh and other poster collectors who found their TFA set didn't match-up – we've reprinted the offending poster in this very issue, ensuring that your Death Star-sized poster is, like 1977 Harrison Ford's rugged, handsome visage, free of any discernible flaws.

Tweet Us!
@EmpireAust Okay, there is no way in hell Idris Elba can be overlooked for the new 007
Woody
@WoodyTheMoonMan

READER V *EMPIRE*: DAWN OF LOGO JUSTICE

Your wonderful article about the World's Finest Punch On (issue #181) – otherwise known as *Bats v Supes: Dawn of Let's See Marvel Top This* had me salivating for the impending release of this incredible comic book geek's dream come true. However, there are a few omissions in your Superman and Batman insignia evolution timelines. There was a *Superboy* TV series from 1988-'92 and an abandoned TV pilot in 1961. Yes I know, you'll argue it's SuperBOY not SuperMAN, nonetheless it's the Superman insignia we're talking here, and whether it be Superman or Super-adolescent, the logo pertains to that same Kryptonian heritage. Oh wait, let's not forget the 1966 Superman cartoon, too. And as for the Batman insignia, well, he had his own cartoon in 1966 too, and a certain live action series the same year, na na na na na na na na...

RAY MILCZARSKI, HAMILTON VIC

Super job, Ray. *cough*

GONE BATTY

I have to disagree with Mark Kemps's letter (*Empire* #181). I reckon *Batman v Superman* will be awesome. Gal Gadot will pop up sporadically throughout and Jesse Eisenberg will remind me of all those smart nerdy blokes I used to know in high school. But the thing is, Mr. Kemp, you can't get back Michael Keaton in the role; he's too indie now he's a critical darling. Val Kilmer is fat, lazy and probably in rehab with Gary Busey (he's probably still channelling Jim Morrison from that Oliver Stone movie). George Clooney, well, he ended the franchise and is all about working with the Coens now. Christian Bale is too young to be playing Batman in his 50s. Which brings me to Ben Affleck: yes we all remember *Daredevil*, but if you watch the director's cut, it kind of redeems him. As for the rest of the movie, I don't have a problem with Zack Snyder's films being gloomy with the rain machine in overdrive. The smart money will be on the Bat putting the Kryptonian in his place, just like Iron Man will do the same with that annoying Captain America in *Civil War*.

BORIS, PERTH, WA

All we know is that at the end of the day, punching wins. Kaplow!



POSTER DILEMMA

Firstly I just want to say that I'm huge fan of the mag and I have been a subscriber for quite a few years now. I work full time and have kids so there's not always a lot of time to sit and read these days, but I have managed carve out a special part of my week which is dedicated to *Empire*. As part of my weekend ritual I make myself a fresh coffee, sit outside and read as much *Empire* as I can within the time frame of two cigarettes. I'm guessing this is probably not entirely a method of consumption that you would publicly condone, but it's one of the best ways to relax and start the weekend. Now that I have established that I think you guys are awesome and a key ingredient to me keeping my sanity, I need to ask for your help with a dilemma that has arisen. I have just received my March issue and discovered that it contains a sweet poster for *Captain America: Civil War*! Combine this with the great *Deadpool* poster from Feb's issue and I've got two new additions that have to go up in my cubicle at work. But as you can see from the photo, I only have room for four standard size posters, which I have populated with my recent favourites. Now this is where I need your help: which ones should I take down to make room for Cap, Tony and the Merc?

DAMIEN BENSLEY, WOODCROFT, NSW

We say give Bond and Hugh the flick and stick to a Marvel Cinematic Universe theme. Not that our decision is influenced by our new editor, Stan Lee...

MORE AFFLECK LOVE

I seem to be the only person on the internet supporting Ben Affleck being cast as Batman – he could play the shark in a *Jaws* re-make and still be awesome! But your March issue has me worried. In your preview on page 71 there is a picture of Batman kneeling down using a knee pad! A knee pad for f**k's sake! Adam West wouldn't have needed any damn knee pad, that's for sure.

TRENT EDWARDS, VIA EMAIL

Holy protected joints, Bat-fan!

GONE ROGUE

I love *Empire* and making videos and pictures – here's a home-made poster I made for *Rogue One*!

ZACH KENNEDY, VIA EMAIL

Nice one, Zach. You're a (Death) star.

IN THE OFFICE THIS MONTH



***Empire*'s David Brown sets his sights on exterminating the crowd at the recent Adelaide Comic-Con. He's the bloke without the plumber's plunger stuck to his face.**

SPINE QUOTE HONOUR ROLE

#181

"Pretty good. Pret-ty pret-ty pret-ty good."

THE TV SERIES

Curb Your Enthusiasm **(2000 – current)**

THE CONNECTION

Said by Larry David who starred in *Whatever Works* with Henry Cavill.

THE WINNER

Gavin Coughlan, via email

THE REWARD

An *Empire* cap for you! Send answers to empire@bauer-media.com.au





FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

ROLAND EMMERICH IS BLOWING UP THE WORLD AGAIN IN *INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE*

"I DON'T THINK IN TERMS OF topping what we did last time," says Roland Emmerich, director of *Independence Day: Resurgence*, the sequel to 1996's epic science fiction disaster movie.

Correct us if we're wrong, but doesn't that large spike headed directly into the Thames look suspiciously like the Burj Khalifa? Go on — turn the magazine upside down. And, last time we checked, that was in Dubai. And on the ground.

Whatever it is, it's clear it's not going to end well for London, and evidence that topping what he did last time is very much on Emmerich's agenda. But for the director, a man who's never seen a major landmark he didn't want to pulverise like a *piñata*, it's not just about blowing things up in new and interesting ways. In 1996 it was fine for blockbusters to be absurd. Nobody cared about Will Smith's inner struggles — they just wanted him to punch aliens and shoot stuff. *Independence Day: Resurgence* is invading a very different world.

"The first movie is 20 years ago so all the people who were kids [*when they watched it*] are now grown-ups. This has to be a movie for people today," says Emmerich. So the story focuses on a new generation, including Maika Monroe as the daughter of Bill Pullman's President Whitmore, and Jessie Usher as the stepson of Will Smith's now-deceased Steven Hiller, coping with what it's like growing up famous. Yet really it's still about aliens trying to wipe out humanity, while humanity, including old-stagers Pullman and Jeff Goldblum as snarky scientist David Levinson, tries to stop them.

"It's fun!" exclaims Emmerich. I think *Independence Day* was maybe the first movie to combine the alien-invasion movie and the disaster movie. That combination is what we're doing again, but this time, with the new technology, we can do anything." Like dropping the world's tallest building on London? It would seem so. OLLY RICHARDS

***INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE* IS OUT ON JUNE 23.**

BULLETIN >> STEVEN SPIELBERG TO DIRECT RELIGIOUS PERIOD DRAMA *THE KIDNAPPING OF*



EDGARDO MORTARA STARRING MARK RYLANCE > ELTON JOHN IN TALKS TO JOIN *KINGSMAN* SEQUEL



ON SET EXCLUSIVE!

OH OH OH IT'S MAGIC

CAN *NOW YOU SEE ME 2* PULL OFF NEW TRICKS?

GREENWICH, LONDON, and it's absolutely bucketing down. Or should that be bucketing up? Flanked by the two pillared blocks of the Royal Naval College, Jesse Eisenberg is pulling off a mighty impression of a meteorological Moses. "I've been told I have control issues," Eisenberg, as prestidigitator J. Daniel Atlas, bellows into the crowd. "Well, if I can't control people, I might as well control the weather..." Then, with arms raised, he does exactly that. The downpour reverses and the rain starts fizzing back up into the night sky. Okay, so the rain's from a rain machine, but it's an impressively brain-boggling display of (apologies in advance) eau-cus pocus.

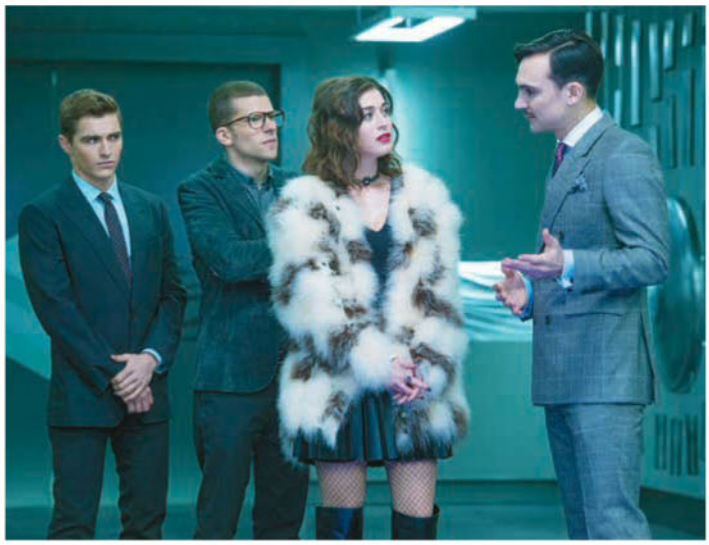
"Believe it or not, this is a real trick," Eisenberg tells *Empire* as he dries off between takes. "As in the first film, we've taken an illusion that can be done in the real world on a smaller scale and then pushed it. Like, *really* pushed it. We're making the rain go crazy — up, sideways, even levitating. It should make for a great set-piece — huge, cutting-edge and super-inventive."

Eisenberg's stunt is the first in a flurry of grand illusions staged around London for the sleeper-hit sequel. The following day, Lizzy Caplan will "produce a flock of doves in one take, for real", says magic consultant Keith Barry, who's designed all of the sequel's illusions to work 'in-scene', without CG. Original director Louis Leterrier has made way for Jon M. Chu, who's bringing the expertise that reinvigorated the *Step Up* series. "The way he's choreographing the set-pieces is almost like an elaborate dance number," says producer Bobby Cohen. What with the booming music and sea of multi-coloured umbrellas, Eisenberg's rain-sequence has more than a hint of a Busby Berkeley vibe.

Globe-trotting from New York to London to Macau, *Now You See Me 2* — or *NYSM2*, according to the posters, even though that takes just as long to say — sees Woody Harrelson, Dave Franco and Eisenberg's world-famous magicians-turned-thieves The Four Horsemen (not to be confused with *X-Men: Apocalypse*'s Four Horsemen) temporarily reduced to The Three Horsemen after a pregnant Isla Fisher pulled out of the film. But with new recruit Lizzy Caplan soon on board, they… do something. Magicians never reveal their secrets, and all that.

Above: Woody Harrelson's Merritt McKinney and Dave Franco's Jack Wilder in *Now You See Me 2*.

> DENZEL WASHINGTON TO DIRECT AND STAR IN DRAMA *FENCES* > SCOTT EASTWOOD AND





"The movie opens with the Horsemen coming out of hiding for a new show," says Eisenberg. "At the risk of sounding like a magician, I can't reveal too much, but they soon get pulled into a strange, dangerous world."

So there's no news on how Mark Ruffalo's Dylan Rhodes, the FBI agent and unexpected dark horse from the first film, fits in this time around. But we *do* know Daniel Radcliffe, the most famous wizard in the world, has been cast as Michael Caine's son, hell-bent on avenging the Horsemen for landing Caine's slippery Arthur Tressler in prison. "Daniel adored the first movie, but told us he'd join on one condition," says Cohen. Which was? "'Please, whatever you do, don't put a wand in my hand…'" **SIMON CROOK**

Top: Franco, Eisenberg and Caplan mid-con? **Above:** Things do not seem to be going well for the Tresslers...

***NOW YOU SEE ME 2* IS OUT ON JUNE 9.**

SERIOUS INVESTIGATION

CAST OFF

IS *NYSM2* THE YEAR'S STARRIEST BLOCKBUSTER? HERE'S THE SCIENCE*...

*Total box office take and oscar wins of all stars



X-MEN: APOCALYPSE

CAST: Jennifer Lawrence, James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender, Nicholas Hoult, Oscar Isaac, Rose Byrne

1 | BOX OFFICE (BILLIONS) $7.1

ACTORS' AVERAGE IMDB RANKING: 142



SUICIDE SQUAD

CAST: Jared Leto, Will Smith, Margot Robbie, Viola Davis, Joel Kinnaman, Jai Courtney

1 | BOX OFFICE (BILLIONS) $4.96

ACTORS' AVERAGE IMDB RANKING: 388



CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

CAST: Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Anthony Mackie, Sebastian Stan, Scarlett Johansson, Chadwick Boseman

0 | BOX OFFICE (BILLIONS) $9.11

ACTORS' AVERAGE IMDB RANKING: 405



NOW YOU SEE ME 2

CAST: Mark Ruffalo, Daniel Radcliffe, Jesse Eisenberg, Michael Caine, Morgan Freeman, Woody Harrelson

3 | BOX OFFICE (BILLIONS) $11.2

ACTORS' AVERAGE IMDB RANKING: 521



BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE

CAST: Henry Cavill, Ben Affleck, Jesse Eisenberg, Jeremy Irons, Gal Gadot, Amy Adams

3 | BOX OFFICE (BILLIONS) $7.4

ACTORS' AVERAGE IMDB RANKING: 307

CHARLIZE THERON CAST IN *FAST 8* > *CREED*'S TESSA THOMPSON TO JOIN *THOR: RAGNAROK*



FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

COMING UP TRUMPS

THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR COULD CHANGE THE WORLD

MOST SATIRICAL FILMS hide their points about sticking it to The Man under the guise of something completely different. Let's talk about subtext, baby.

Not *The Purge: Election Year*. The third (and possibly final) part of the low-budget but successful *Purge* trilogy about a near-future America in which all crime is legal for 12 hours once every year, James DeMonaco's movie is about a female politician (Elizabeth Mitchell) who wants to change the system, and is targeted by a hardcore right-wing element. Sound familiar? "I wanted to do genre movies that had a little social commentary," says DeMonaco. "That's what we were doing, sneaking ideas into this genre piece. But we're not sneaking anymore — now we're openly saying shit out loud, and nobody's stopping us!" Subtext is for wimps.

DeMonaco claims that the release of *Election Year* in, well, an American election year is actually serendipitous. "I had no idea it would all tie in timing-wise with the election," he protests, possibly too much. "That it's coinciding with Trump and Hillary, or whoever it's going to be, is pretty fascinating."

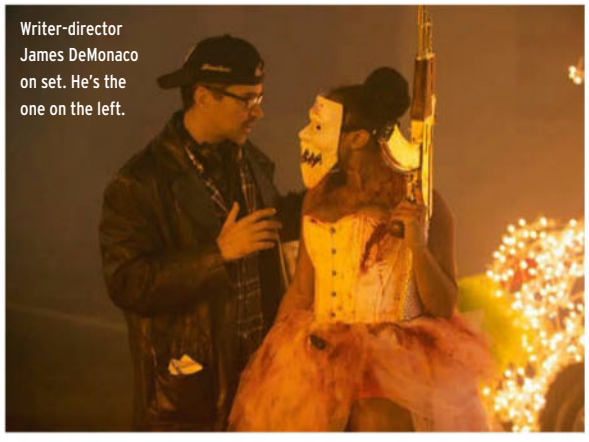
Still, it's a coincidence the film's marketing team is grabbing with both hands — an advert for the movie ran during a recent Republican debate and generated huge buzz. So, does DeMonaco think his movie, which stars Frank Grillo as the badass fighting to save Mitchell and defend democracy, might have an impact on the November election? "Will it have an actual effect on who people vote for? I don't know, but people may be able to blow off some steam," he says. "It's a very stressful time in America. When people see the film the reflection will be clear, how there are parallels between all the characters that are in play right now. Hopefully it'll start a discussion."

Then again, it could have a negative impact. "For the first time, we have someone who would probably look at the *Purge* movies, nod his head and go, 'That's actually a pretty good idea!'" laughs DeMonaco of a certain Republican candidate. "That's terrifying." A real *Purge*? Perhaps the next movie could be a documentary… CH

***THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR* IS OUT ON JULY 14.**



Above: A Purger considers her vote. **Here:** Frank Grillo leads an anti-Purge team.



Writer-director James DeMonaco on set. He's the one on the left.

> FIFTH *UNDERWORLD* TO BE TITLED *BLOOD WARS* > HUGH DANCY JOINS *FIFTY SHADES DARKER*

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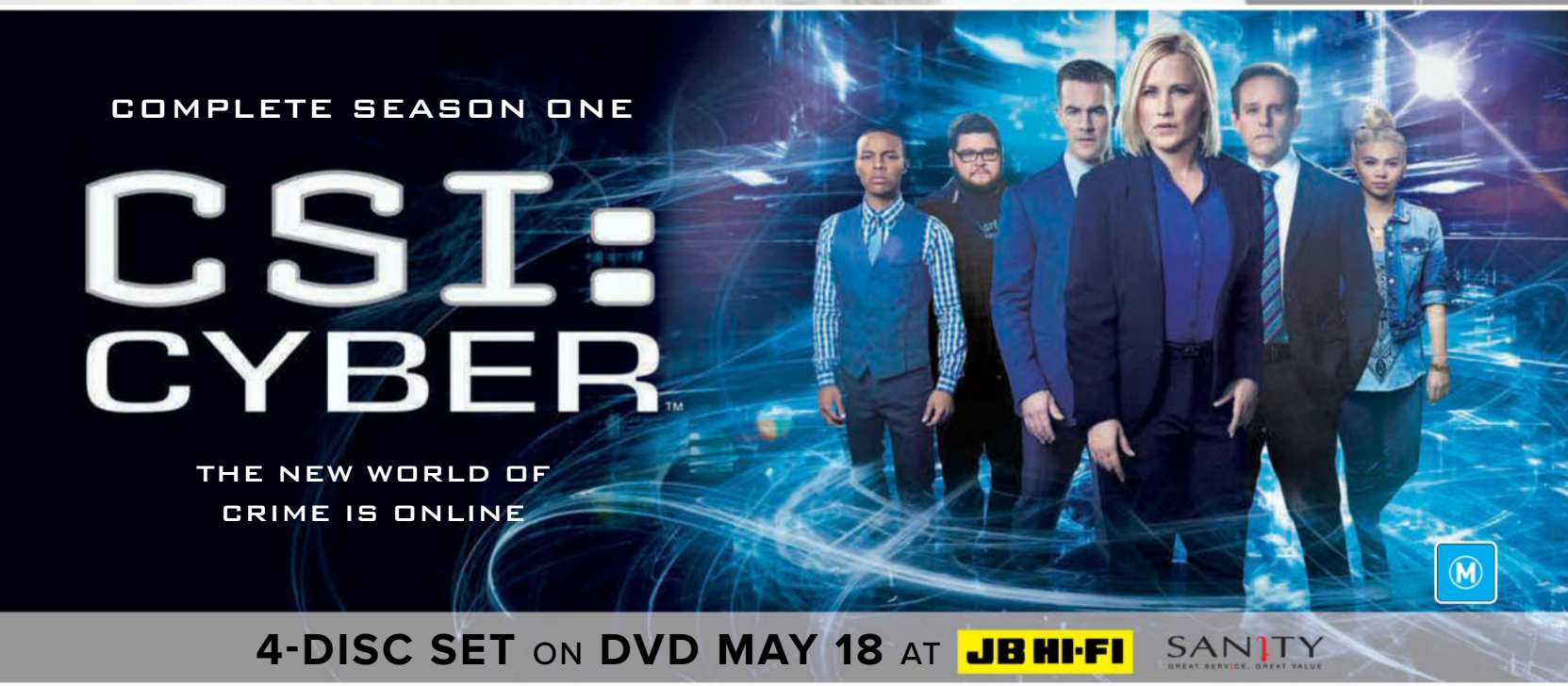


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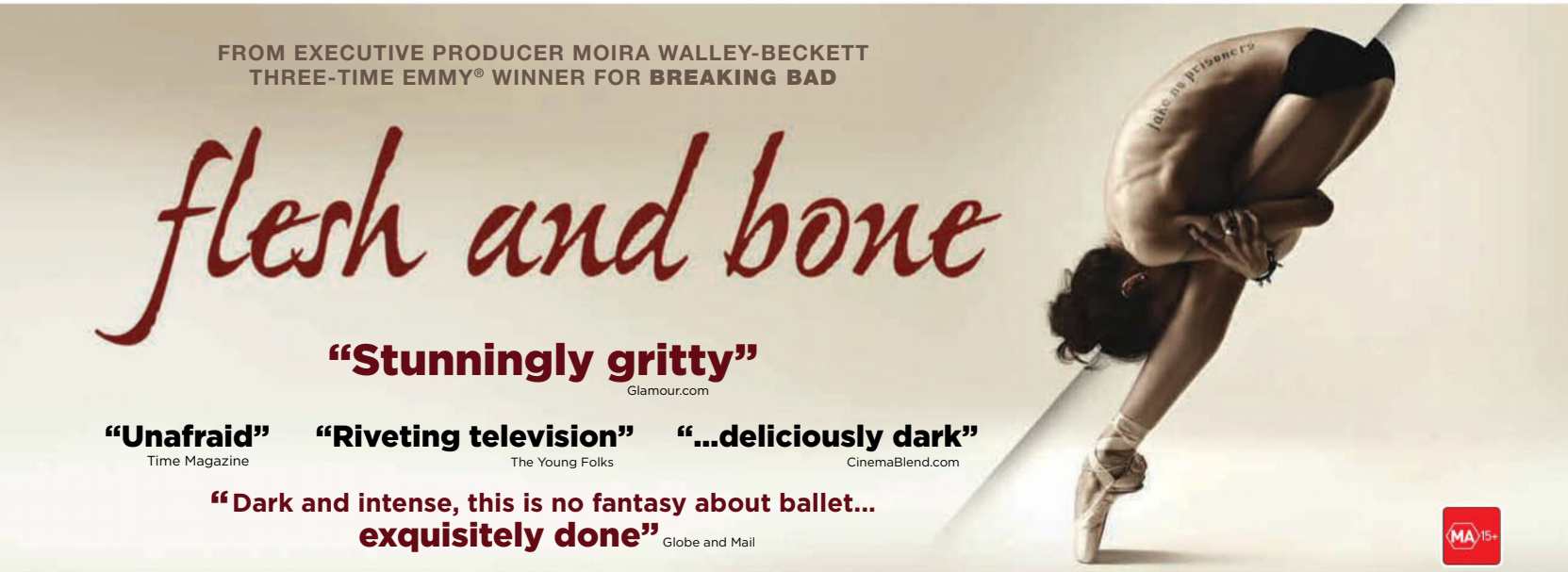
"Stunningly gritty"
Glamour.com

"Unafraid"
Time Magazine

"Riveting television"
The Young Folks

"...deliciously dark"
CinemaBlend.com

"Dark and intense, this is no fantasy about ballet... exquisitely done" Globe and Mail



2-DISC SET ON **BLU-RAY & DVD MAY 18** AT JB HI-FI SANITY GREAT SERVICE. GREAT VALUE



Causing controversy: Zoe Saldana as Nina Simone, with added prosthetic nose and darker skin tone.

REPORT

BACKLASH BLUES

HOW TWO MUSICAL BIOPICS GENERATED VERY DIFFERENT CRITICAL REACTIONS

HIS IS A TALE OF TWO biopics. Both involve actors playing musical icons. Yet only one has become mired in controversy.

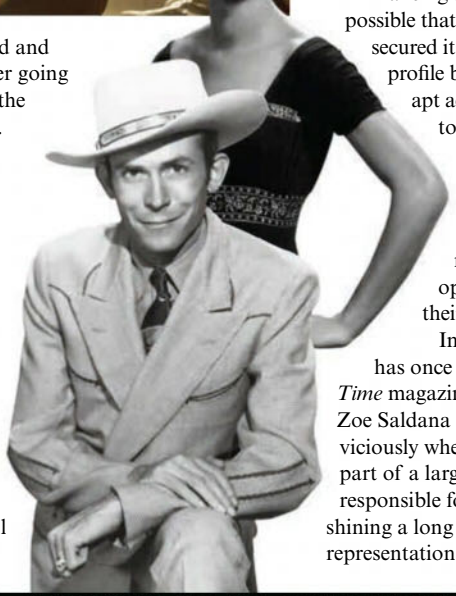
I Saw The Light tells the tale of Hank Williams, the Alabama country singer responsible for classic songs like *Lovesick Blues*, who died at the height of his fame aged just 29. He's played in Marc Abraham's movie by Tom Hiddleston, a man so British he bleeds warm beer. "He was the real deal," says Hiddleston of Williams. "His music was just so searingly honest."

Yet, despite not seeming the most obvious fit for Williams's unique brand of Americana, only a minor relative has come forward to suggest that Hiddleston might not be the most authentic choice.

Compare and contrast with *Nina*, Cynthia Mort's movie about the final years of blues legend Nina Simone. From the minute Zoe Saldana was cast in 2012 as a late replacement for Mary J. Blige, the film has attracted criticism from some quarters, including Simone's own daughter, Simone Kelly, for the decision to choose Saldana, a lighter-skinned Puerto Rican-American, to play the dark-skinned singer.



Tom Hiddleston as country legend, Hank Williams. **Below:** Nina Simone and Hank Williams, as themselves.



However, filming went ahead and now, almost four years later, after going through production difficulties, the movie is ready for its US release. Which is when it all kicked off again. A trailer for the movie, showcasing the heavy make-up Saldana underwent in order to play Simone, with darker skin and a prosthetic nose, was greeted with derision. A tweet from Saldana quoting Simone — "I'll tell you what freedom is to me — no fear" — elicited a response from @NinaSimoneMusic, the official Twitter account of Simone's estate, which had no involvement with the film. "Cool story, but please take Nina's name out of your mouth. For the rest of your life."

Saldana has said in the past the controversy "did affect me", but on this occasion she has stayed mum. It has, though, reignited a debate about the authenticity of casting in biopics. Some, such as *Guardian* contributor Frances Acquaah, feel that Saldana should never have been cast. Others, like Queen Latifah, have defended the right of Saldana, as with any actor, to play Simone.

Then there's the harsh realities of film financing to consider — it's entirely possible that the movie wouldn't have secured its funding had a lower profile but perhaps more physically apt actress been Mort's choice to replace Blige; a damning indictment of Hollywood's Catch-22 system: by not giving actresses of colour a chance to make their name, they restrict the opportunities that come their way.

Interestingly, Simone Kelly has once again weighed in, telling *Time* magazine, "It's unfortunate that Zoe Saldana is being attacked so viciously when she is someone who is part of a larger picture." If *Nina* is responsible for anything, it'll be for shining a long overdue light on race and representation in cinema. CH

> DAVID WENHAM JOINS MARVEL'S *IRON FIST* > HBO TO DEVELOP *FAHRENHEIT 451* FILM

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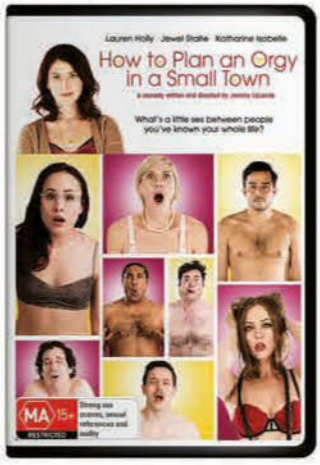


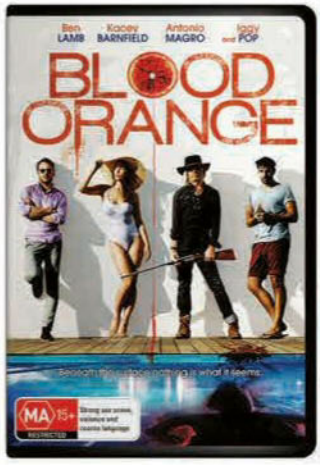






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FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

FRESH FISH

ANDREW STANTON FINDS HIS WAY BACK TO PIXAR WITH *FINDING DORY*

AFTER *FINDING NEMO*, I thought I was done," says Andrew Stanton. But just when he thought he was out, he pulled himself back in. "About seven years later, I found myself watching the film again and realised I was worried about Dory."

Dory, of course, was the forgetful fish, voiced memorably by Ellen DeGeneres in the first movie, who tagged along with Albert Brooks's Marlin as he tried desperately to find his son. Spoiler: he did. So, Nemo was found, and Stanton had long since moved onto his ultimately ill-fated *John Carter*. It seemed, like Brad Bird before him, that he was making the transition from animation to live action. But he just couldn't forget Dory.

Even as he started work, Stanton refused to so much as think the words "Finding Dory", wary of inviting immediate pressure to deliver. He hired writer Victoria Strouse, and only once they were sure they had a story did he pitch anything to the studio's brain trust. It was September 2012, two years after Stanton started work, that the project was publicly announced.

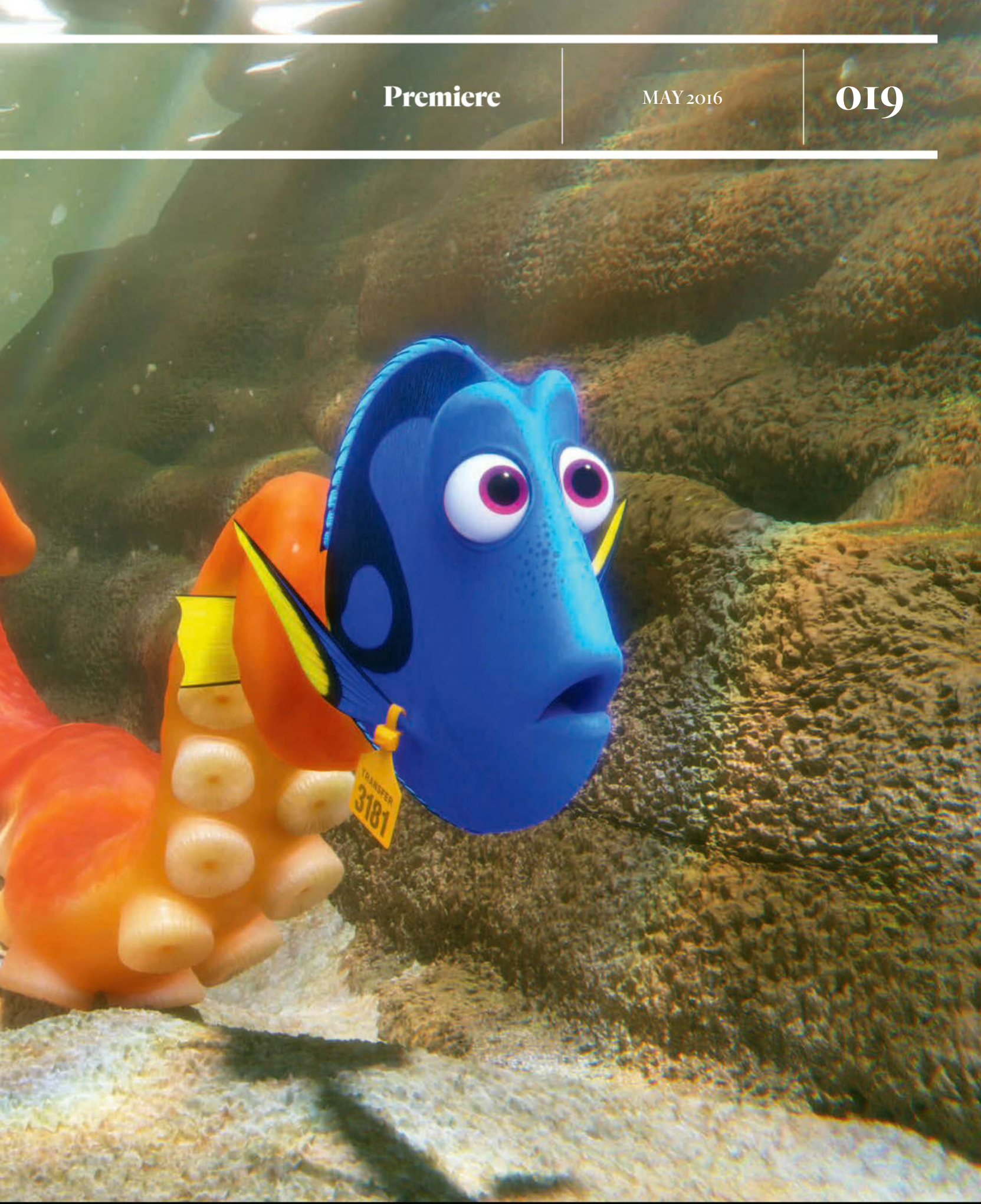
The finished tale picks up one year after Nemo was found, with Dory living in a brain coral next to Marlin's anemone home. All seems rosy — but one day a slight accident triggers Dory's memory of her family, and she sets out in search of them. Numerous adventures lead her to a Marine Life Institute, where she meets Hank (Ed O'Neill), a grumpy octopus escape artist who agrees to help her.

The movie is a homecoming for Stanton after *Carter* floundered at the box office. "To go back into animation production was like comfortable shoes," he says. "I still have a lot of other live action ideas, and I'm hoping sometime in the future I'll get to do them." For now, being the biggest fish in a big pond is more than enough for us.

HELEN O'HARA

***FINDING DORY* IS OUT ON JUNE 16.**

> BEN AFFLECK WILL WRITE, DIRECT AND STAR IN STAND-ALONE BATMAN FLICK



> DISNEY DEVELOPING LIVE-ACTION PETER PAN FILM > MARVEL PLANNING BLACK WIDOW MOVIE

BEST OF TIMES/WORST OF TIMES

JON FAVREAU

THE JUNGLE BOOK DIRECTOR TALKS SPACESUITS, FAT ASSES AND SWINGING WITH DENNIS HOPPER



COSTUME



Swingers was fun. I was going for a certain aesthetic. I'm thinking of the open-collared, short-sleeved shirts with slacks and shoes. I look at it now and we were young and sharp. It really feels like a different life. It felt very special.

In *Deep Impact*, we had to wear the second-generation NASA suit. It was based on what NASA was working on. It was so heavy – it was hard like armour, with big helmets and backpacks. That was pretty brutal.

MOMENT



Swingers got into the Venice Film Festival. I'd never been to Europe and then I went to a black-tie screening on the Lido. After, I got to sit with Dennis Hopper, telling me how much he enjoyed the film.



I had a tremendous affection for _Cowboys & Aliens_, but I realised that the concept wasn't connecting when the trailer first showed. People saw the name and they didn't know how to react. I got a sense this wasn't going to go well.

AUDITION

Rudy, in Chicago. I came in thinking I didn't have a shot. It was a lead in a Hollywood film, and I hadn't had much chance to prepare. David Anspaugh, the director, said, "It says you are an improviser; go ahead and improv." I was confident and having a good time. It clicked.

Auditioning for Fat Ass in *The Shawshank Redemption*. My agent said, "I got an audition for you. It's a great script, based on Stephen King." Then they told me the name – Fat Ass. That was humbling, but of course I did it. The audition wasn't bad, but I didn't get the part.

LOCATION



I really liked working in downtown Los Angeles, at LA Center Studios. We had a backlot for _Jungle Book_ and we would build little sets that could be rolled into the stages. And being able to go home every night was a luxury.



I did _Very Bad Things_ out in Vasquez Rocks, a rocky desert on the outskirts of LA. It's beautiful, but desert doesn't mean hot, it means dry. It was bitterly cold, and we were in khaki pants and T-shirts. It tests your commitment.

PIECE OF DIRECTION

From David Anspaugh on *Rudy*. I was used to doing comedy in Chicago, so after my first day, I thought I was killing it. David turned off my radio mic and said, "Just a little smaller. Okay?" I was impressed he was concerned I wasn't embarrassed in front of anybody.



It's not a piece of direction, but what I do notice is that when I give direction, I've learned to be more open to what I'm seeing unfolding, even if it's not what I imagined.

***THE JUNGLE BOOK* IS OUT NOW.**

THINGS WE'VE LEARNED



Andrew Lincoln has yet to see *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Too busy killing zombies, we reckon.



Ryan Reynolds cried the first time he wore the Deadpool costume. Tears of joy, rather than it being too tight around his deadpools.



Jack Black says he was originally meant to sing Marvin Gaye's *Got To Give It Up* in *High Fidelity*.



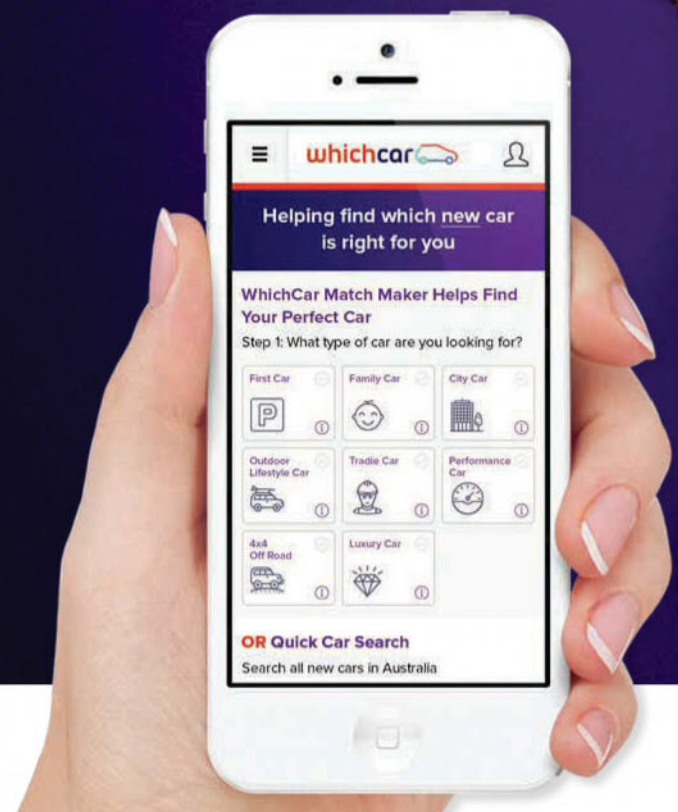
Jason 'Lucius Malfoy' Isaacs voiced three chimps in UK TV ads for tea in the '90s. THREE.

> BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH TO STAR IN ANIMATED FLICK OF *HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS*

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19 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT... THE DARK TOWER

AS THE LONG-AWAITED MOVIE ADAPTATION FINALLY GOES INTO PRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION **MICHAEL WHELAN**

> *SOUTH PARK*'S TREY PARKER TO PLAY VILLAIN BALTHAZAR BRAT IN *DESPICABLE ME 3*

AT LAST — AFTER YEARS trudging through development hell, Stephen King's magnum opus, *The Dark Tower*, is heading to the big screen. So, what is it? Who's in it? Why should you care? Here's the *Empire* lowdown.

1 While King is best known for his horror work, this is a fantasy epic that spans different timelines and dimensions, inspired by an unlikely combination of Robert Browning's poem, *Childe Roland To The Dark Tower Came*, *The Lord Of The Rings*, and the Spaghetti Westerns of Sergio Leone.

2 It tells the tale of Roland Deschain, a gunslinger who comes from a version of Earth called Mid-World. For reasons far too complex to go into here, Roland's obsessed with making it to the Dark Tower, the nexus of all existence, and demanding answers from whatever deity resides within.

3 To help him in his quest, he is accompanied by his *ka-tet*, a motley crew of characters drawn from different time periods. Among them are Eddie Dean, a former junkie; Susannah Dean, a paraplegic African-American; and Oy, a dog-like creature of indeterminate origin.

4 There are eight books in the series: *The Gunslinger*, *The Drawing Of The Three*, *The Waste Lands*, *Wizard & Glass*, *Wolves Of The Calla*, *Song Of Susannah*, *The Dark Tower* and *The Wind Through The Keyhole*.

5 *The Wind Through The Keyhole* was published in 2012, but is a prequel novel. The seventh book, which saw the saga end, was published in 2004.

6 There is also a comic book series, published by Marvel and endorsed by King, which began in 2007 and fills in the blanks of Roland's life and journey.

7 It is the crowning glory of King's career, with plot points and characters that weave through his entire bibliography. But you don't need to have read all of King's work to get these references.

8 The scale is so huge that a previous plan to adapt the books took the form of three movies, with two seasons of a linking TV show in-between.

9 Ron Howard had been previously attached to direct, with Akiva Goldsman writing the screenplay. The project had been set up initially at Universal, and then Warner Bros., where it ultimately fell apart.

10 It was announced in early March that Sony had picked up the rights and, with Howard and Goldsman on board as producers, was pushing ahead.

11 Nikolaj Arcel, who wrote the Swedish version of *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* and directed Danish drama *A Royal Affair*, will write and direct.

12 He's already cast his Roland — in a progressive and significant piece of colour-blind casting, Idris Elba will be practising Roland's trademark finger-spiral as the gunslinger.

13 And Elba will be chasing down Matthew McConaughey as Walter Padick, the Man In Black, who is also Randall Flagg, the bad guy of *The Stand*. Told you it was meta-textual.

14 King himself tweeted confirmation of their casting, and he did so using the very first line from the very first book.

15 Young British actor Tom Taylor will play Jake Chambers, another key member of the *ka-tet*.

16 Abbey Lee — last seen hissing the word 'schlanger' in *Mad Max: Fury Road* — has also joined the cast as Tirana, who's a minor character in the books.

17 Arcel has been circumspect about the number of films planned, but rather than announcing a trilogy, or a series of movies, Sony is taking it one film at a time.

18 The first film won't simply be an adaptation of the first, rather slim, volume, *The Gunslinger*. King has confirmed that it will begin in the middle of the story.

19 The number 19 plays an important part in *The Dark Tower* mythos. King, who started writing the series when he was 19, tweeted the news of the production at 9.19am. Which, of course, adds up to… **CHRIS HEWITT**

***THE DARK TOWER* IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 23, 2017.**



Best Twitter buds: Matthew McConaughey (who plays the Man In Black) and Idris Elba (who plays gunslinger Roland Deschain).

THIS MONTH IN *STAR WARS*



1

REVEALED!
Filming on *Episode VIII* is well and truly underway. To mark this auspicious occasion, a video was posted on starwars.com that showed writer-director Rian Johnson and crew filming a scene on Skellig Michael, the Irish island that has become Luke Skywalker's temporary home. The scene appears to pick up where *The Force Awakens* left off...

2

CONFIRMED!
Along with the video came confirmation of most of *Episode VIII*'s key cast, including those we knew about (John Boyega, Daisy Ridley, Oscar Isaac, Adam Driver, Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher), those who'd been rumoured (Benicio Del Toro) and those we didn't see coming (Laura Dern and newcomer Kelly Marie Tran). Curiously, Peter Mayhew's name was left off the list.

3

RUMOURED!
Although *Episode VIII* is still 19 months away, salvation, it seems, may be at hand. There are rumours that Star Wars Day, May 4, may well see the official unveiling of the next instalment's name. Two frontrunners have reportedly emerged, both of which should be taken with a huge pinch of salt: *Tale From The Jedi Temple*, and *The Order Of The Dark Side*.

› STEPHAN ELLIOTT'S *FLAMMABLE CHILDREN* TO STAR GUY PEARCE AND KYLIE MINOGUE

FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

THE NEXT TRICK

FOR *THE CONJURING 2*, JAMES WAN HAS SPIRITED PRODUCTION TO LONDON

MARYLEBONE station, London, and the train arriving at platform one is late… by about four decades. Thanks to some epic set-dressing voodoo, the crew working on *The Conjuring 2* have wound the clock back to 1977 and it's scarily convincing. Raleigh Choppers are propped against fences. There's a poster up for *Exorcist II: The Heretic*. Extras are wearing enough corduroy and polyester to qualify as a fire hazard. Stepping off an immaculately grotty British Rail carriage, Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga, returning as Ed and Lorraine Warren, the real-life demon-busters whose exploits anchored 2013's *The Conjuring*, exit the platform and climb into an Austin Allegro. Suddenly, Farmiga freezes and her eyes glaze over. In the crowd, *something* is looking back… Five minutes in London and she's already seeing dead people.

The first *Conjuring* took place in Rhode Island, but for the sequel, director James Wan and his team have relocated to Enfield. At first glance, it's all a bit humdrum, but the London suburb just happens to be home to the most aggressive poltergeist case ever recorded.



Lorraine Warren (Vera Farmiga) pops in for a flying visit in *The Conjuring 2*.

> SPIDER-MAN'S MCU SOLO FLICK TO BE CALLED *SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING* > JOHN KRASINSKI





Above: Filming at Marylebone.
Here: Madison Wolfe as young Janet Hodgson.

What occurred at 284 Green Street is truly baffling — a sustained poltergeist assault on the Hodgson family that saw 11-year-old Janet strangled by curtains, hurled across rooms and possessed by a sinister entity calling itself Bill.

"Oh, you'll be hearing and *seeing* Bill Wilkins," smiles producer Peter Safran. "The Warrens investigated thousands of cases — what drew us to Enfield was the stark, dramatic contrast. Single mother, four kids, poverty, council house — opposite circumstances to the American family under attack in *The Conjuring*."

Wan, who's returning to his first love — horror — after breaking the billion-dollar barrier with 2015's *Fast & Furious 7*, is keen to recapture the original's black magic while avoiding its only on-set miscalculation. "You know, a lot of strange stuff happened shooting the first movie," says Safran. "Weird things, like everyone waking up en masse at 3am. We're more prepared this time. We had the set blessed by an exorcist on the first day of production."

"The script's based on what the Warrens saw, along with the Hodgsons' own experiences," says James Wan. In fact, Wan's pledge to "stay close to events" has even won over the notoriously reclusive Hodgson sisters, Margaret and Janet. They were consulted on the script, appear in a cameo and even toured their old house, albeit a version rebuilt on an LA sound stage. By all accounts, the eerie accuracy brought back frightening memories. God help the Hodgsons when they see the finished film.

SIMON CROOK

***THE CONJURING 2* IS OUT ON JUNE 16.**

ON THE RADAR



Tye Sheridan has bagged the lead role of ace hacker Wade Watts in Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One*.



It's not the years or the mileage – Harrison Ford and Steven Spielberg will reunite for a fifth *Indiana Jones*, due July 19, 2019.



Peter Berg and Mark Wahlberg have teamed up again on *Patriots Day*, a thriller about the Boston bombings.



Harry Styles has joined Christopher Nolan's World War II epic *Dunkirk*. Yes, that Harry Styles. And yes, that Christopher Nolan.

LINING UP ROLE IN J.J. ABRAMS'S *GOD PARTICLE* > BARBRA STREISAND REVIVING *GYPSY*



FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

WTF IS WHISKEY TANGO FOXTROT?

EMPIRE WATCHES TINA FEY GO TO WAR

IN *WHISKEY TANGO FOXTROT* (army-alphabetese for "what the fuck?"), Tina Fey plays real-life US journalist Kim Barker, who was sent to the Middle East as a war correspondent, narrowly avoided being blown up, was propositioned by Pakistan's former president, and found herself living with fellow journos who lived every day as if it were their last. Because, well, it might have been. It all sounds a bit Oscar-baity. It all sounds like the first serious role for Hollywood's Queen of Comedy. It all sounds a bit WTF. Thankfully, it isn't.

"Oh, it's really funny. It's a comedy," says WTF (Wonderful Tina Fey) on the film's Santa Fe set, standing in for Afghanistan. "This is not truly a war movie, it's more political. I'm just looking for things where it's remotely plausible I could be like that person." She gestures at *Empire*, as the closest thing to a journalist in the vicinity. "I feel like I could fit among you." Excellent news — we'll need 450 words on the film please, Tina, by Monday morning.

The movie is based on Barker's memoir, *The Taliban Shuffle*, which came to Fey's attention when she was namechecked in a *New York Times* review. She then optioned the book with *Saturday Night Live* producer Lorne Michaels and grabbed long-term collaborator Robert Carlock (*30 Rock*, *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*) to write, while Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, directors of *Crazy Stupid Love* and *Focus*, lined up behind the camera. Fey gently rebukes Carlock for writing a movie in which she appears in virtually every scene.

"I have to shoot the whole movie!" she says, mock indignant. "The part where I walk to the car. The part where it's the other person talking."

The other people include another reporter (Margot Robbie), who takes Kim under her wing, and a photo-journalist who Kim has a 'holiday' romance with. For this pivotal role, Fey handpicked Martin Freeman. "We met at a fabulous Hollywood party once, as all actors do," she smiles, "and after the orgy we exchanged emails." WTF FTW.

OLLY RICHARDS

WHISKEY TANGO FOXTROT IS OUT NOW AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 43.

Clockwise: On set with Billy Bob Thornton, who plays Colonel Walter Hollanek; Tina Fey plays Kim Baker and Martin Freeman plays Iain MacKelpie; Margot Robbie plays Tanya Vanderpoel; Stephen Peacocke plays Nic.

> MELISSA MCCARTHY AND BEN FALCONE DEVELOPING NEW COMEDY *LIFE OF THE PARTY*







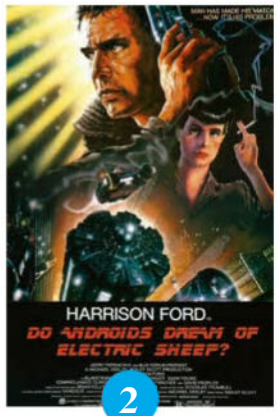
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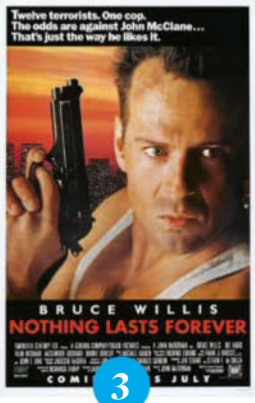
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EDGE OF TOMORROW



2

BLADE RUNNER



3

DIE HARD



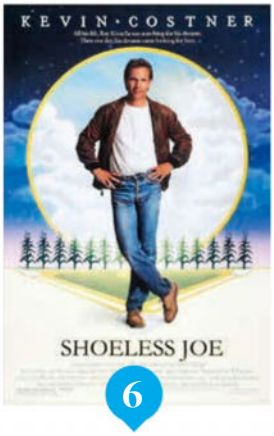
4

THERE WILL BE BLOOD



5

WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT



6

FIELD OF DREAMS

> ANDY SERKIS'S *JUNGLE BOOK* BUMPED TO 2018 > JONAH HILL TO DIRECT *MID '90S*



FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

ABOUT TIME

ALICE IS BACK – AND FORWARD – IN *THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS*

IT'S BEEN SIX YEARS SINCE Tim Burton's *Alice In Wonderland* became a billion dollar-grossing sensation. Surprisingly, in this era of instant sequels, it's taken that long for Disney to press the button on a follow-up — but it's finally here in the shape of *Alice Through The Looking Glass*, inspired by, rather than slavishly based on, the Lewis Carroll book of the same name.

"The book is fantastic in its own right," says James Bobin, the British director (*The Muppets*, *Flight Of The Conchords*) who's calling the shots now the previous incumbent has gone for a Burton. "But it's largely based around the game of chess. And Alice meets various people, none of whom have cause and effect, and therefore it doesn't make a great narrative for a film."

Bobin's solution: replace a Tim with a Time, in the shape of Sacha Baron Cohen. "Time has this great sense of self-importance," says Bobin of the movie's new villain. "Sacha is very good at the comedic trope of the confident idiot." Cohen's Time drives the plot of this brain-bending presequel, as Alice (Mia Wasikowska) ventures into Underland, a place where "time is a geographical construct," says Bobin. "You have to literally move through time, backwards and forwards, to find the place you need to go."

The reason for Alice's quest? To save the family of Johnny Depp's Mad Hatter. "Johnny pushed the character emotionally," says Bobin. Did he have to wear a Tim Burton mask in order to direct Depp, we wonder. "We all had black suits and I had Robert Smith hair," he laughs. "No, I was just me — a British man in a suit." Wonderful.

CHRIS HEWITT

ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS IS OUT ON MAY 26.

> NEW *STAR TREK* TV SERIES SET BEFORE *STAR TREK: TNG* > MORRISSEY BIOPIC *STEVEN* ADDS

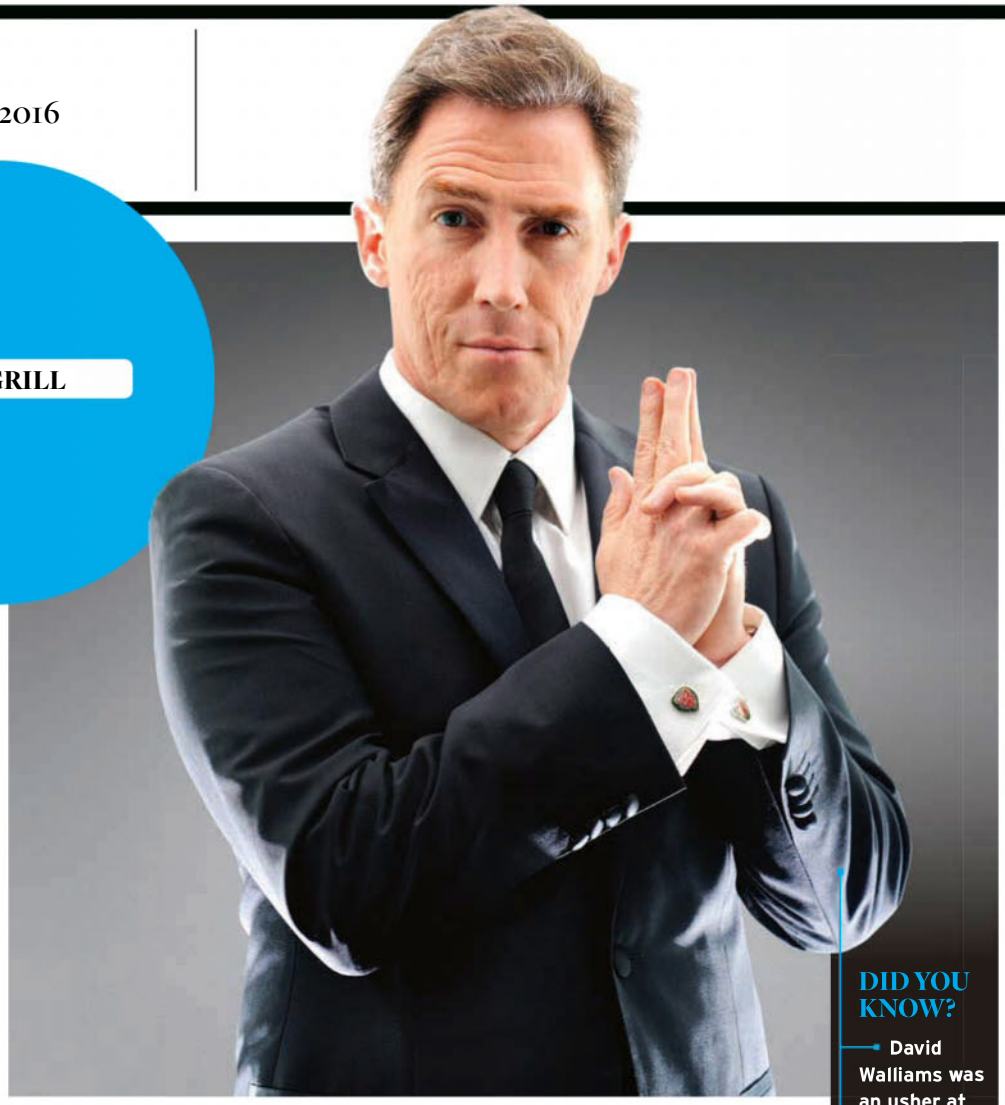


JESSICA BROWN FINDLAY >*GOOSEBUMPS*' ROB LETTERMAN TO HELM *DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS*

THE GRILL

ROB BRYDON

THE STAR OF *THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR* FEELS THE HEAT



On a scale of one to 10, how famous are you?
I'm a two. The interesting thing about fame is, if Mark Ruffalo and [*UK journalist*] Eamonn Holmes were to walk along Oxford Street or through High Wycombe, I'd imagine Eamonn Holmes would get far more attention and hassle. I was on *Jonathan Ross* at the weekend with Taylor Lautner, who is evidently a big deal, but I'm a 50-year-old man, so hadn't had the fortune for him to touch my life yet. He was a lovely kid, but I'm not a *Twilight* person. I like the chocolates of the same name.

Where's the strangest place you've been recognised?
We were canoeing down the Ardèche, a huge gorge in France, and I was getting people shouting across the water to me. It's a family consensus that one man crashed his canoe so I would have to go in and rescue him.

What's your nickname?
Some of my friends call me Bobby. You can't get much shorter than Rob.

Who were you in your first school play?
Luke Skywalker. We mounted possibly the world's first stage production of *Star Wars* in 1978, maybe, and I took the lead role. I wasn't to realise at that time that the role of Han Solo was actually more coveted. We used toy lightsabers, with batteries in the handle. During the climactic sequence between Obi-Wan and Darth Vader, such was the ferocity of the fight that the lid came off the handle and the batteries rolled cheekily across the stage, slightly taking away from the solemnity of Obi-Wan's demise.

Who's the most famous person in your contacts?
Elvis Presley. He never calls back.

What's the best thing you've ever stolen from a hotel?
There was a quite expensive painting in a hotel in the South of France, but other than that I don't think I've stolen anything.

When did you last care about money?
In terms of being worried about not having enough? Probably the mid-'90s. Well done, me!

When were you most starstruck?
Anthony Hopkins and Bruce Springsteen. Separately. When I met Anthony Hopkins, I got a little short of breath.

Do you do your own shopping?
Not really. [*UK online supermarket*] Ocado deliver quite a lot. I'm still a man of the people. Just different people.

Who was your first movie crush?
A girl in *Jaws 2*, who I think played a cousin. I've not watched it since I first went to see it in Swansea, but I do remember being taken with a girl who played a cousin in it.

What would you do if you woke up and found you were Bruce Willis?
I'd want to know what the hell was going on.

On a scale from one to 10, how hairy is your arse?
Probably only a four. It's nothing to write home about, which is a shame, as Mum and Dad used to love those letters.

CHRIS HEWITT

What's your favourite word?
I like "abundant". It's nice to say and a bit like being in a stationery shop — it suggests so many possibilities.

THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR IS OUT NOW.

DID YOU KNOW?

- David Walliams was an usher at his wedding.
- His first movie was 1995's *First Knight*, where he was uncredited as a man in a crowd.
- He went to school with Catherine Zeta-Jones.



• ALLAMY

> DAVID OYEWOLO JOINS GUN CONTROL DRAMA FROM *MONEY MONSTERS* PRODUCERS

CLASSIC PIC

JUNGLE BOOGIE

JAZZ ENTERS THE JUNGLE

RUDYARD KIPLING'S *THE JUNGLE Book* (released in 1894) was thrust into the swinging '60s in the be-boppingest of ways via a 1967 animated adaptation that boasted an upbeat, jazzy score (Jon Favreau's current live-action update mercifully doesn't go full 2016 with a hip-hop soundtrack). The cool scene here has hepcat Louis Prima (the voice of King Louie; on trumpet), Sam Butera and his band The Witnesses busting out the classic *I Wan'na Be Like You* (with 'jazz cigarettes', presumably, just out of shot).Feel the vibe, Daddy-O.



> PRODUCER SIMON KINBERG REVEALS *WOLVERINE 3* SET TO TAKE PLACE IN THE FUTURE

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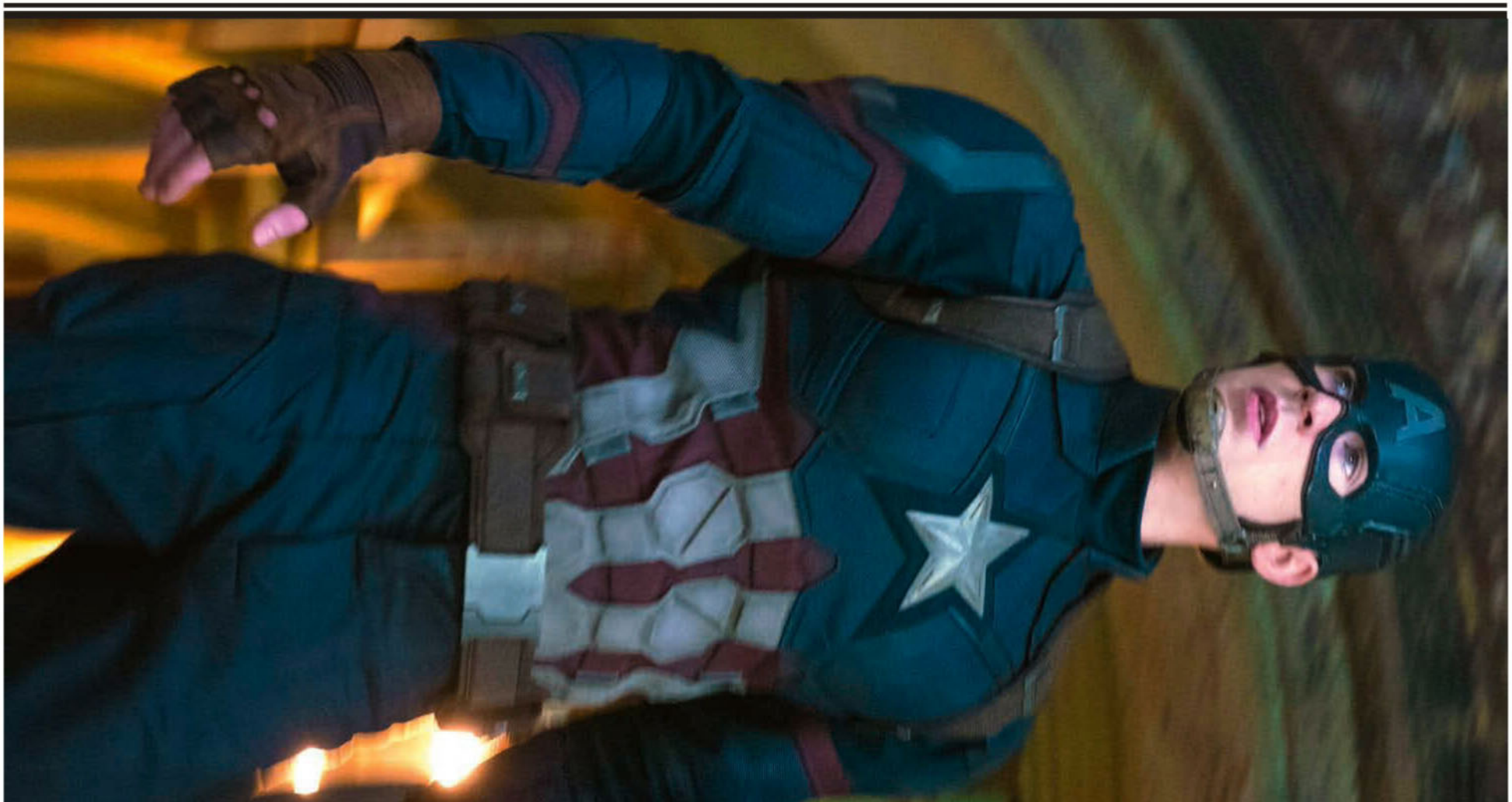
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NEW MOVIES REVIEWED AND RATED | MAY 2 — MAY 29, 2016

In Cinemas

EDITED by JAMES JENNINGS

THE EMPIRE MOVIE GUIDE | UNMISSABLE ★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★ GOOD ★★★ POOR ★★ TRAGIC ★





Super-pals Captain America (Chris Evans) and Bucky (Sebastian Stan), side by side again.

Captain America: Civil War

★★★★★

OUT **NOW** / RATED **TBC** / **146 MINS.**

DIRECTORS Joe and Anthony Russo
CAST Chris Evans, Robert Downey Jr., Sebastian Stan, Scarlett Johansson, Chadwick Boseman, Elizabeth Olsen, Anthony Mackie, Daniel Brühl

PLOT After Captain America sidekick-turned-assassin Bucky Barnes (Stan) resurfaces, tensions between Steve Rogers (Evans) and Tony Stark (Downey Jr.) turn into a full-on Avengers schism.

WHEN THE AVENGERS FIRST assembled four years ago, it felt like a grand culmination, the ultimate Marvel superhero event: its Big Four characters united (well, eventually) against a colossal planetary threat. Since then, the studio's ever-expanding Cinematic Universe has delivered sequels of varying quality and introduced new heroes in stand-alone movies (well, as close to stand-alone as Marvel can ever get), but it's never quite matched the ensemble-balancing finesse and Earth-quaking-action scale of Joss Whedon's initial assembling. Certainly not in his clunkier, team-gathering follow up, *Age Of Ultron*. Until now.

Captain America: Civil War is the best Marvel Studios movie yet. There, we said it. First, and most importantly, it does what the best Marvel films do: juggling multiple characters so each is allowed its moment in a story that pushes forward the series' overall continuity, while also forming and concluding its own cogent plot. So here Scarlet Witch (Elizabeth Olsen) wrestles with the consequences of her immense power; Vision (Paul Bettany) starts getting to grips with being 'human'; Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) finds herself torn when the battle line is drawn; and supposed retiree Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner) just can't stay out of the fight. Even Paul Rudd's Ant-Man receives more than a tokenistic 'hey it's him!' cameo, and in spectacle terms at least, is given the film's biggest scene.

Then there are the new recruits: Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman, playing it gravelly and furrow-browed), nimble protector of a secretive African ›

nation who has his own beef with the Winter Soldier, aka Bucky Barnes (Sebastian Stan); and a quippy kid from Queens (Tom Holland) who crawls up walls in a red-and-blue outfit and can shoot webs at people. His introduction to the action is resoundingly joyous, the reboot the character truly deserves.

At its not-so-soft-and-gooey centre, though, is the friendship between Steve Rogers (Chris Evans) and Bucky, two war buddies out of time, one of them out of his mind. Stan remains, for the most part, as blank and frosty as he was in *The Winter Soldier*, allowing only the occasional warm glint of '40s sidekick Bucky. Evans, meanwhile, further hones a role he's effortlessly owned for five movies now, pushing Steve to impressive new depths and reminding us his straight arrow still has a dangerous edge.

The Steve/Bucky thread stretches back to the first *Captain America* — the heart of the film, it's what makes it work as *Cap Three*. But built around that is a bigger conflict that also makes the '*Avengers Two-And-A-Half*' billing valid.

Similar to the way Zack Snyder's DC-world reacted to Superman's ascension and the emergence of its "metahumans" — though here it is more lightly and elegantly handled — the world of the Avengers has had enough of these "enhanced" agents wreaking collateral havoc and decided, not unreasonably, to bring them to account. So US Secretary Of State Thaddeus Ross (William Hurt, reappearing for the first time since he was just a monster-chasing General in *The Incredible Hulk*) presents the Sokovia Accord, signed by 117 countries, which states the Avengers should be answerable to the United Nations. Wracked with guilt over his Ultron faux-pas, Tony Stark's all for it, and Robert Downey Jr. burdens the still occasionally glib hero with a weight-of-the-world weariness that is well matched by his own MCU mileage. But stubborn Steve, distrustful of the post-War world's version of 'authority', refuses to sign on the dotted line.

It's bold of writers Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely to place their title hero in the most obviously dubious position. If the Avengers don't answer to the UN, who *should* they answer to? And Steve's defence of Bucky is questionable: he may be his childhood friend, but now he's a lethal, robot-armed killing machine forever in danger of being reactivated. It's fair enough that he should be brought to heel, right? Then again, there are flaws in Tony's arguments, too, especially the problematic evidence on which he rests them. Who the audience should agree with is hardly a clear-cut matter.







Top: End of the Rhodey? Iron Man (Robert Downey Jr.) with his fallen comrade (Don Cheadle). **Middle:** Team Cap, assembled! **Bottom:** Spider-Man (Tom Holland) finally joins the MCU.

It's even bolder that the conflict at the film's heart doesn't pander to genre convention and become sidetracked by a grandstanding supervillain plot. And this is the second way *Civil War* earns our Greatest Marvel Yet accolade: by rising above the series' greatest weakness. Too often, all that snappy writing and slick action is undermined by flimsy big bads and formulaic final acts. Yet there is no Loki or Ultron (or, for that matter, Lex Luthor) equivalent this time. Not a whiff of Thanos, or any more of those forgettable Marvel sub-baddies with 'The' for a middle name. There is a meddling manipulator — of course there is — but, interestingly, his agenda is as blurred as Steve's and Tony's. Arguably just as sympathetic, too. Directors Joe and Anthony Russo don't just want to rocket your heart into your mouth with their action sequences, which have the tight choreography of a Greengrass *Bourne*, and the brutal flair of a Gareth Evans rumble; they want to keep your brain firmly engaged, too.

Who needs a villain when you have Steve and Tony? Both protagonists. Both antagonists. And drawing other power-people to their cause in surprising ways. The clashes go far beyond the set-up squabbles of *The Avengers*. Or even that other big 2016 superhero showdown. Forget *Batman v Superman*. Here you get *Ant-Man v Spider-Man*, *Hawkeye v Black Widow*, *Scarlet Witch v Vision*, *The Winter Soldier v Black Panther* and (well, duh) *Captain America v Iron Man*, all rolled into one. And *that* is what you call the ultimate Marvel superhero event. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT Matching its blockbuster scale and spectacle with the smarts of a great, grown-up thriller, *Captain America: Civil War* is Marvel Studios' finest film yet. There. We said it again.

The Huntsman: Winter's War

★★☆☆☆

OUT **NOW** / RATED **M** / **114 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Cedric Nicolas-Troyan
CAST Chris Hemsworth, Emily Blunt, Sam Claflin, Charlize Theron, Jessica Chastain, Nick Frost

PLOT Seven years after Snow White defeated the evil Queen Ravenna (Charlize Theron), Eric the Huntsman (Chris Hemsworth) tries to keep the Magic Mirror away from Ravenna's sister – the equally cruel Ice Queen (Emily Blunt).



Gold pondered what price she'd get for Silver.

ALTHOUGH SOLD HEAVILY IN trailers as a prequel to 2012's dark fairytale remix *Snow White And The Huntsman*, the bulk of this follow-up actually takes place after that film's events. It's a small detail, but an important one, in the sense that it speaks to a wider confusion of intent that turns *Winter's War* from a fitfully enjoyable hunk of fantasy nostalgia into a perplexing tangle of different timelines and retconned plot threads.

The core tale starts simply enough. Gravelly narration shows us nascent wicked stepmother Ravenna (Charlize Theron, gamely selling the overwrought cackling) in her pre-Snow White days and briskly sets up the tragic death that turns her kindly sister Freya (Emily Blunt) into the fearsomely powerful Elsa-alike Ice Queen. Newly fitted with a hardened heart, kick-ass frozen palace and Karl Lagerfeld hair, Freya sets about turning orphans from the villages she topples into an army of adorable killers who will grow to be her Huntsmen (never mind that half of them are women).

Two of these deadly warriors are Eric and Sara (Chris Hemsworth and Jessica Chastain, armed with ill-advised Celtic accents), who, in defiance of their queen's wishes, fall in love and plot an escape that ends in disaster. Seven years later, with Snow White indisposed (original star Kristen Stewart has been dealt a poisoned apple and doesn't even appear in flashback), Eric is enlisted to find the Magic Mirror before it falls into Freya's frigid clutches.

Thus begins (eventually) the strongest portion of the film, as Eric and a band of misfits — including Rob Brydon, Nick Frost, Sheridan Smith and Alexandra Roach stealing scenes as a quartet of boisterously offensive dwarves — chase the requisite mystical MacGuffin through a visually striking fantasyscape. Hemsworth, despite the anaesthetised *Braveheart* voice, does a decent impression of a man enjoying himself and French director Cedric Nicolas-Troyan (promoted from his visual effects role on the first film) brings an exhilarating intensity to a battle with a horde of goblins.

But in the end it's hard to see the wood for the enchanted trees. Allegiances switch back and forth, obvious twists come lolloping over the horizon and it all starts to resemble stray fantasy elements — *Lord Of The Rings*, *Frozen*, *Willow* — cynically thrown into a whirring blender with the lid off. "This is the worst plan ever," says Eric, not long before a set-up for another sequel lands with all the subtlety of a swinging axe. Hard to argue with that.

JIMI FAMUREWA

VERDICT Visual inventiveness and spectacular casting can't quite salvage a muddled fantasy epic that, if it were a magic mirror, would be held together with gaffer tape.

ALSO OUT

Bastille Day

★★★☆☆

OUT **MAY 12** / RATED **TBC** / **91 MINS.**
DIRECTOR James Watkins
CAST Idris Elba, Richard Madden, Charlotte Le Bon

A schlocky action film about terrorist attacks in Paris might seem inappropriate, but the plot (street thief Madden snatches a bag carrying a bomb, and the terrorists use hashtags to coordinate their plans) is too daft to be taken seriously. While it rarely makes sense, you're never bored. **JNU**

A Month Of Sundays

★★☆☆☆

OUT **NOW** / RATED **PG** / **110 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Matthew Saville
CAST Anthony LaPaglia, Justine Clarke, Julia Blake, Indiana Crowther

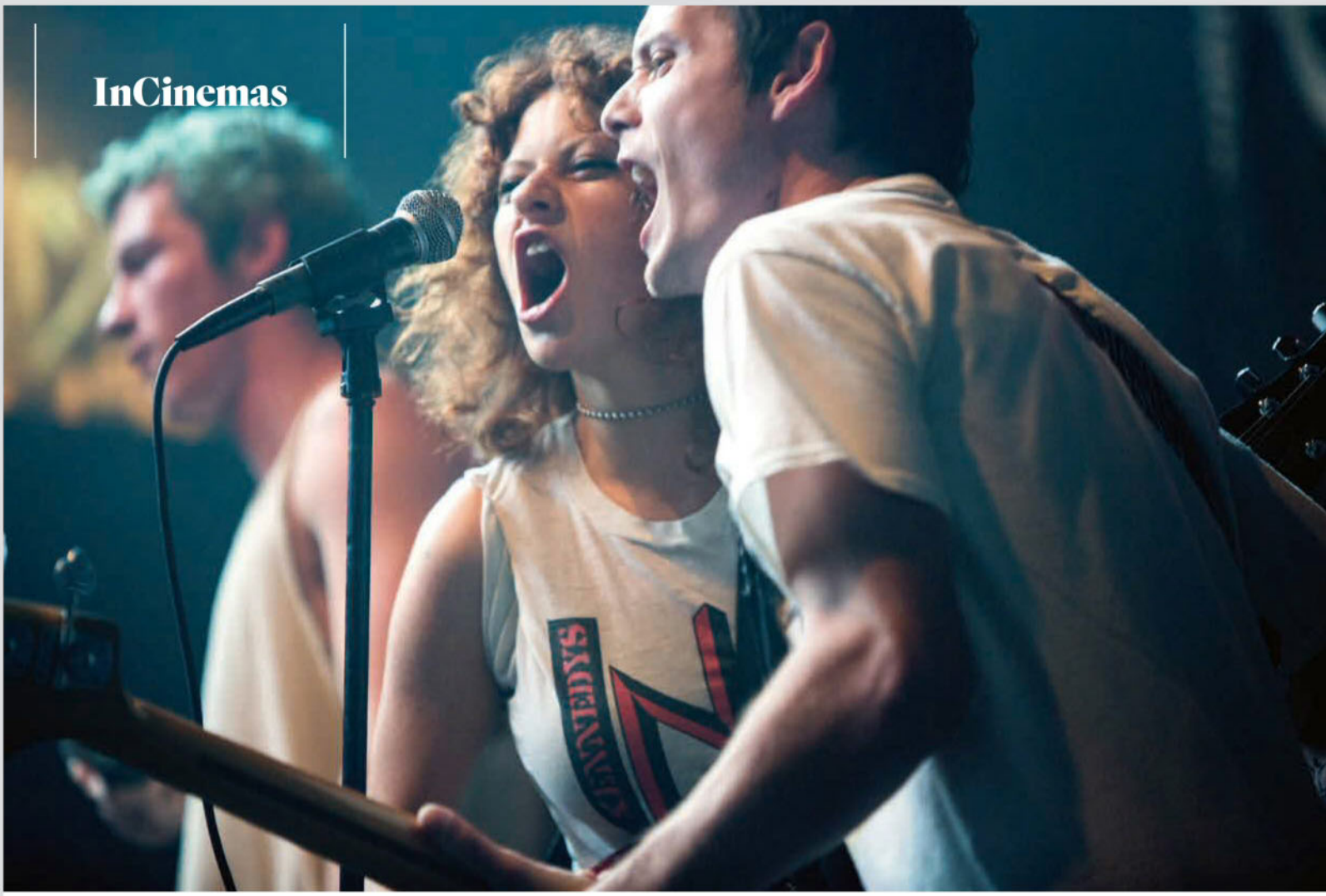
Written and directed by *Felony* helmer Matthew Saville, this downbeat comedy, starring Anthony LaPaglia as a miserable real estate agent stuck in a rut, barely raises a smirk. Only saved by the lead's dependable performance, lethargic *A Month Of Sundays* feels like just that. **DMB**

Harry & Snowman

★★★★☆

OUT **MAY 5** / RATED **G** / **83 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Ron Davis
CAST Harry DeLeyer, Snowman (a horse, not an actual snowman)

A charming and moving doco about a man's bond with the record-setting horse he saved from the slaughterhouse, with some fascinating glimpses of 1950s New York and WWII-era Holland. The amazing true tale makes up for some uneven storytelling; expect to get teary-eyed. **TK**



Green Room

★★★★☆

OUT **NOW** / RATED **TBC** / **97 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Jeremy Saulnier
CAST Anton Yelchin, Imogen Poots, Patrick Stewart

PLOT Backwoods Oregon. Punk band The Ain't Rights have to fight for their lives when a group of neo-Nazi thugs lay siege to the bar they're playing in.

WRITER-DIRECTOR JEREMY Saulnier is among the most inventive, versatile filmmakers working in low-budget, indie genre movies. Following break-out black comedy *Murder Party* and revenge noir *Blue Ruin*, he's expertly turned to siege mechanics with this powerful suspense picture.

An opening sequence deftly establishes our heroes, The Ain't Rights, as defiant followers of the punk flame while explaining the Blues Brothers-like misunderstandings that get them booked to play a far-right club. Opening their set with a cover of the Dead Kennedys' *Nazi Punks Fuck Off* might seem suicidal, but their nerve creepily wins over a few of the audience, including the spaced-out screwdriver-murderer who fronts the house band.

Post-gig, after stumbling over a corpse, The Ain't Rights hole up in the green room with the dead girl's friend Amber (Imogen Poots, with a neo-Nazi haircut) and bouncer Big Justin (Eric Edelstein) who they take hostage. Put-upon manager Gabe (Saulnier's recurring star Macon Blair) calls in his boss, Darcy (Patrick Stewart, relishing a chance to be evil for once), to negotiate or murder away the problem.

Like many great siege movies, this alternates edgy conversations with bursts of action as both sides work out plans to break in or get away, and then have to think fast when things go south. There are shock-gore moments aplenty, and the order in which characters are culled isn't entirely guessable.

There are also hidden depths to the line-up of musos and skinhead thugs, with the presence of softie indie-drama types Anton Yelchin (as the world's worst inspirational speaker) and Alia Shawkat (as a motormouth cleverclogs guitarist with a secret fondness for Simon & Garfunkel) hinting their characters might not be the hardnut outcasts they claim — which later adds to the suspense as they reveal unexpected capabilities.



"The lights are turned way down low, Make it so, make it so, make it so..."

It's no more an in-depth look at the American neo-Nazi scene than *Assault On Precinct 13* was a sociological study of LA gangs (though it has some unsettling specifics — "Red laces only," Darcy insists when calling in his troops), but with it so effectively meshing spiky suspense and action with blackly comic touches, who really needs it to be?

KIM NEWMAN

VERDICT A riotous, rough-hewn and rousing punk reinvention of '70s-style grindhouse exploitation-with-a-brain cinema.



Where To Invade Next

★★★☆☆

OUT **NOW** / RATED **M** / **120 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Michael Moore

CAST Michael Moore, his three chins

Michael Moore "invades" other countries to plunder their ideas for the US. A hazy thesis – "Some places do some things better than America" – leads to an unfocussed ramble across many topics, compared with his laser-guided polemics in earlier films. Sadly, Moore only talks to people he agrees with – none of the film shows the problems (or problem-makers) in the US, so his slyly subversive everyman shtick, used in other films to draw out hypocrisy, is pushing on an open door here. Moore's at his best when fuelled by outrage, not jovially nodding along. It's also obvious that Moore misses George W. Bush as a comic foil; there's multiple Dubya references throughout. He's gone, Michael. It's been eight years. Move on. But it's still a thought-provoking, occasionally stirring, look at "what-if". **TK**



The Divergent Series: Allegiant

★★☆☆☆

OUT **NOW** / RATED **M** / **121 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Robert Schwentke

CAST Shailene Woodley, Theo James, Miles Teller, Jeff Daniels

By presenting a future based around the equivalent of *Cosmo* personality quizzes (Shailene Woodley: mainly Cs) and made up of people with no surnames, *Divergent* didn't begin with the most lucid of premises. *Insurgent* muddied things further and *Allegiant* adds yet another layer of mythology to flummox and bamboozle. Jeff Daniels's Bureau Of Genetic Welfare heralds a eugenics überplot, which escalates the conflict at the expense of internal logic and good sense. What's worse, Shailene Woodley's Tris is largely ignored, relegated to bovine acquiescence while Theo James's Four unravels the whole conspiracy. With the finale's second half, *Ascendant*, still to come, this is Competent but neither Consistent nor particularly Coherent. **JD**

DID YOU KNOW?

Shailene Woodley wore a back brace for two years during her teens to correct her spine's curvature.





Mia Madre

★★★★☆

OUT **MAY 5** / RATED **M** / **106 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Nanni Moretti

CAST Margherita Buy, John Turturro, Giulia Lazzarini, Nanni Moretti

Margherita (Margherita Buy) is directing an earnest social-realist drama starring an unpredictable American actor (John Turturro) while caring for her dying mother (Giulia Lazzarini) and discovering how she sabotages all of her personal relationships. Initially director Nanni Moretti (*The Caiman*, *We Have A Pope*) satirises the business of filmmaking quite amusingly. But as real life seeps into the artificiality of the world of filmmaking and we get to know these people intimately, insights and emotions build beautifully, poignantly ruminating on the ties that bind us and the things that matter. Among the excellent principal cast, top-billed Turturro enlivens things wonderfully, but the real star, Buy, is magnificent. **ANGIE ERRIGO**



The Man Who Knew Infinity

★★★☆☆

OUT **MAY 5** / RATED **PG** / **109 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Matt Brown

CAST Dev Patel, Jeremy Irons, Toby Jones, Stephen Fry, Jeremy Northam

The true story of an unlikely partnership between self-taught Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan (Dev Patel) and Cambridge don G.H. Hardy (Jeremy Irons) in Edwardian England. A near-miss attempt at another *The Theory Of Everything*, it plays out like a sports movie with Hardy as Srinivasa's coach, teaching him the need to methodically prove his spontaneous insights. Yet while it nails the racial stuffiness of 1910s England and the difficulty of Srinivasa's achievement, it wastes time in awkward scenes in India where an arranged marriage is fuzzily observed. The exact nature of Srinivasa's ideas is barely sketched, too, which obscures just why he was so great – the equivalent of a film about Miles Davis in which he never picks up a trumpet. **AL**

DID YOU KNOW?

Jeremy Irons owns Kilcoe Castle (which he had painted a rusty pink) in County Cork, Ireland.





The Jungle Book

★★★★☆

OUT **NOW** / RATED **PG** / **106 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Jon Favreau
CAST (VOICES) Idris Elba, Bill Murray, Ben Kingsley, Scarlett Johansson, Neel Sethi

PLOT Raised by a pack of wolves, man-cub Mowgli (Sethi) is forced to return to "the man village" when bloodthirsty tiger Shere Khan (Elba) gets his scent in his nostrils.

IT'S ALWAYS A RISK REIMAGINING beloved classics — whether it's childhood touchstones, sci-fi icons or comic book adaptations, there will always be nostalgia fundamentalists who insist any change to the Sacred Original Text is heresy. But Jon Favreau has found the sweet spot between reverence and reinvention — and created a technical benchmark to boot.

What's most impressive in Favreau's world-building is his restraint — and if that sounds odd in a film with a singing 20-foot extinct ape voiced by Christopher Walken, we can't overstate how immersive the movie is, and how few tricks the director deploys to jolt you out of the trance. Considering the movie is almost entirely CGI, the "camera work" is utterly realistic, so that it feels traditionally filmed, and for much of the movie it's stunning to remember that this was entirely shot on green screen in LA.

Neel Sethi — plucked by Favreau himself from over 2000 video auditions — is just charming as Mowgli. Sethi's wide-eyed charisma more than makes up for any inexperience as an actor, and he radiates surprise and delight — in part because Favreau had the Jim Henson Creature Shop create puppets of the animals for him to act with. When he beams at Bill Murray's Baloo, you really feel the bond of childhood chums.

It's just a feast, almost an overload for the senses. It's an astonishing achievement in CGI, in the level of detail: not only the physical textures of the fur, the water, the fire, but the background detail too — try to watch what all the hundreds of monkeys are up to in the background of King Louie's temple. There's slapstick humour hidden in there that could only be completely unearthed by a dozen viewings. It's worth staying in your seat for the end credits too: Favreau makes use of the actual book seen at the start of the 1967 version, retrieved from the Disney museum by a cotton-gloved archivist.

But it's not just a technical feat: it's also just a sweetly told tale — drawing on, but not beholden to, elements of the 1967 film and from different stories in Kipling's book — that is, let's not forget, made first and foremost for kids. If it's a tad episodic in the build-up, it draws together neatly in the end; and the moral of the tale is clear without beating you over the head. Is it too scary for littl'uns? Possibly for delicate tykes — the roar of the photorealistic Shere Khan will send shivers up spines of all ages — but it's more exciting than terrifying.

For musty traditionalists harrumphing that Favreau had the gall to deviate from the 1967 2D version: why not stay home and watch the 1967 2D version? For everyone else, this is an amazing and joyous romp that doesn't just mine Disney's film archive — it elevates it. **TIM KEEN**

VERDICT Visually glorious, and loads of fun, this stands with the best of Disney's catalogue.

We would have cast Bill Murray as a groundhog in a scene that repeats over and over.

Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice

★★★☆☆

OUT **NOW** / RATED **M** / **151 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Zack Snyder
CAST Ben Affleck, Henry Cavill, Jesse Eisenberg, Gal Gadot, Jeremy Irons, Amy Adams, Holly Hunter, Laurence Fishburne

PLOT In the wake of Zod's assault on Metropolis, Superman (Cavill) is eyed by many with suspicion, not least Lex Luthor (Eisenberg) and Bruce Wayne (Affleck). Both formulate schemes that could see the alien destroyed for good.



IN *THE LEGO MOVIE*, WILL Arnett's Batman sang an ode to being glum in Gotham, which included the lyrics, "Darkness! No parents! Continued darkness! More darkness, get it?" But even he's out-moodied by the iteration in *Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice*. For those who thought *Man Of Steel* was too gloomy and navel-gazing, we have some bad news: the addition of Bruce Wayne to the franchise has not lightened the mood any. Horribly scarred both inside and out, Ben Affleck's grey-templed Darkest Knight is so morally burned out that he not only subdues foes, but tortures and brands them like cattle. His dreams are plagued by screeching, man-sized bats. There's nothing wrong with a little angst, but here it's doubled down: pitting him against an insecure and self-doubting Superman, Zack Snyder's movie is a spectacle that proves heavy on visual pizzazz but markedly light on fun.

As with other 'versus' films — *Alien Vs. Predator*, *Freddy Vs. Jason*, *Kramer Vs. Kramer Vs. Godzilla* — the title carries a charge of giddy promise. Two titans of pop culture will, we are assured, rearrange city streets with each other's faces. And once it arrives, the fight is a tightly choreographed, berserkly overwrought treat. But talk about delayed gratification: Snyder makes you wait, and wait, and wait for the championship bout. As the colon in the unwieldy title suggests, this is really two movies squished into one. Besides another run-through of Bruce Wayne's tragic backstory, *Dawn Of Justice* strains to both set up a plausible conflict between the two superheroes, and shift pieces into place for future spin-offs. It's a film with a lot on its mind.

It's with an hour to go that *Dawn Of Justice* goes nuts when Batman and Supes go cape-to-cape through the slums of Gotham, a sight to justify the slow and gloomy build-up. There are ultra-sonic blasters, machine-gun turrets, kryptonite grenades, everything but the kitchen sink. (Our mistake: a sink gets smashed on someone's head, too.) It's here at last that the movie discovers its *joie de vivre*. Which is why it's a shame that Snyder feels the need to throw in a city-smashing Uruk-hai afterwards. A climax to a climax, it's CGI overkill, making for an exhausting denouement.

Batman knew he shouldn't have left Superman in charge of bringing the brollies.

Metahumans are glimpsed — hastily setting the table for *Justice League*, doing in four minutes what took Marvel four years — though, with one trippy exception, they don't actually interact with our main characters. That honour goes to Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman, who makes a big impact in the climax. It's a landmark moment, executed well. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

VERDICT This has its moments, which makes the whole enterprise worthwhile, and introduces an intriguing new Batman. But it's also cluttered and narratively wonky, and in need of jokes.

ALSO OUT

The Boss

★★☆☆☆

OUT **NOW** / RATED **MA15+** / **99 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Ben Falcone
CAST Melissa McCarthy, Kristen Bell, Peter Dinklage, Kathy Bates

There's certainly fun to be had here as McCarthy's Trump-esque businesswoman goes to jail for insider trading, but this sickly tale of redemption by cookies sits queasily next to an ultra-violent street battle and Dinklage sleazing it up with a samurai sword. A not-so-hot mess. **DMB**

First Monday In May

★★★★☆

OUT **MAY 12** / RATED **M** / **90 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Andrew Rossi
CAST Andrew Bolton, Anna Wintour

If you've ever looked longingly at the glamour of the MET Gala and wished you were there, this is appointment viewing. It ponders the notion of whether fashion is art, and peeks behind the scenes of what at the time was the biggest MET exhibition ever. A rare insight into an ethereal world of fantastical fashions. **EB**

Florence Foster Jenkins

★★★☆☆

OUT **MAY 5** / RATED **PG** / **110 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Stephen Frears
CAST Meryl Streep, Hugh Grant

Believing herself to be a decent opera singer, Florence (a hilarious Streep) takes lessons, but no-one can dare tell her she's terrible, least of all her husband (Grant). It's a funny, fizzy period lark with stunning city settings and a top-notch cast. As a film it doesn't take many risks, but it certainly entertains. **ALS**



Midnight Special

★★★★☆

OUT **NOW** / RATED **M** / **112 MINS.**

DIRECTOR Jeff Nichols
CAST Michael Shannon, Joel Edgerton, Kirsten Dunst, Jaeden Lieberher, Adam Driver, Sam Shepard

PLOT Eight-year-old Alton (Lieberher), a boy with unearthly abilities, is on the run from both the cult that exploits him and the US government. With the help of his father (Shannon), he must fulfil his destiny.

YOU MAY HAVE MISSED IT amongst all the domestic drama, but there's often been a supernatural tinge to writer-director Jeff Nichols's work. His last film, *Mud*, teased that its fugitive title character (played by Matthew McConaughey) might be a little more than human, while the man hunting him was described as "the devil his'self" (our attempt at writing an Arkansas accent). The movie before, *Take Shelter*, conjured vast visions of an apocalypse that may have sprung from the troubled mind of its protagonist (Michael Shannon). Now, in his fourth picture, Nichols finally puts the supernatural front and centre.

As with his previous two films, *Midnight Special* plays with religious themes (perhaps to be expected from a filmmaker raised in the Bible belt). Cosmically gifted/cursed child Alton (Jaeden Lieberher) and his father Roy (Michael Shannon) are fleeing a Christian-ish cult which feeds on Alton's glowy-eyed power. But while the boy's origin is resolutely mysterious, it at least becomes clear he is something other than divine.

Through both his propulsive road-chase plot-engine and lens-flaring visual style, Nichols makes good on his claim that *Midnight Special* is a tribute to John Carpenter's *Starman* and Spielberg's *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*. He's not the first 21st-century filmmaker to draw from the '80s sci-fi well, of course. J.J. Abrams's *Super 8* was an unreserved Amblin tribute, while Rian Johnson's *Looper* riffed on early Cameron and Verhoeven. *Midnight Special* would complement both perfectly on a triple bill, yet it remains distinctly A Jeff Nichols Film, while also proving far more than the sum of its references.

Nichols mounts impressive visual effects and frantic bursts of action; one awesome sequence sees an air-force satellite plucked from orbit and brought down, flaming like a meteorite storm, onto a petrol station. But the film's strength is in its humanity rather than its super-humanity, whether that's being realised by Adam Driver as empathic NSA investigator Sevier, Joel Edgerton as Roy's capable, conscience-driven partner-in-crime Lucas, or Shannon and Lieberher at the story's heart. It's a shame, though, that Kirsten Dunst's role as Alton's mother, Sarah, is frustratingly underwritten — almost as if the character were shoehorned in late in the writing process, as Nichols realised how male-dominated his film was.

For all Nichols's mastery of the genre flourishes, from Alton's incandescent glare to a dazzling final-act reveal, *Midnight Special* doesn't hit harder than one intimate moment when Alton begs his dad to stop fretting about him, and Roy replies, "I *like* worrying about you." After all, this is really just a story about the joy and pain of parenthood, something you certainly won't miss amid the pyrotechnics and celestial visions. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT Soulful sci-fi. A tribute to '80s classics, but with a 21st-century twist: *Close Encounters* of a new kind.

The tall grass left him hangin' with his high-five.



Whiskey Tango Foxtrot

★★★☆☆

OUT **MAY 12** / RATED **TBC** / **112 MINS.**

DIRECTORS Glenn Ficarra, John Requa
CAST Tina Fey, Margot Robbie, Martin Freeman, Billy Bob Thornton

PLOT In 2003, cable TV underling Kim Barker (Fey) travels to Afghanistan to work as a frontline war reporter and is slowly entranced by the thrill of the battlefield.

DESPITE HAVING A cupboardful of Emmys, Tina Fey arguably hasn't quite found big-screen work to match her TV hits. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, written by her regular collaborator Robert Carlock, mostly succeeds in its aim to set this right. Based on blackly comic 2011 memoir *The Taliban Shuffle*, it tells the true story of Kim Barker (Fey) — a jobbing cable news reporter who, at the advent of the Iraq War in 2003, swaps her airless New York cubicle for a new life reporting from the frontline in Afghanistan.

So begins a kind of *Zero Dark 30 Rock*, as Barker — a catastrophically inexperienced klutz with a sniper-friendly bright-orange rucksack — feels her way into a world of hard-drinking adrenalin-junkie journalists, who have turned Kabul's bullet-ridden buildings into their own personal frat houses. Here in 'the Kabubble', while trying not to breathe in air that we're cheerfully told is "mostly faeces", she encounters an alternative family, ranging from frenemy British reporter Tanya (Margot Robbie) to raffishly obnoxious Scottish photojournalist Iain (Martin Freeman).

The first hour — an effective juxtaposition of raucous partying and battlefield tension — is by far the strongest section of the film, playfully running with the fish-out-of-water conceit and packing in laughs alongside action that's impressively composed by directing duo Glenn Ficarra and John Requa. Carlock's script is well stocked with fast, sharp one-liners and zippily conveys Barker's three-year journey from frightened newbie to battle-hardened thrill-seeker.

However, the tonal gearshifts — from broad *M*A*S*H* update to serious examination of war and addiction — occasionally induce whiplash. And later attempts to tally the emotional cost of Barker's transformation don't always feel earned. That said, the lasting impression is of a smart, commendably complex comedy that finally translates some of Fey's snarky small-screen potency to the cinema. **JIMI FAMUREWA**

VERDICT Comedy for grown-ups that sometimes struggles with its ambitious brief, but always remembers that the best laughs contain the odd shard of shrapnel.

Australia's Deadliest Home Videos got nixed at the pilot stage.

ALSO OUT

Angry Birds

OUT **MAY 12** / RATED **TBC** / **TBC MINS.**
DIRECTORS Clay Kaytis, Fergal Reilly
CAST Peter Dinklage, Kate McKinnon, Jason Sudeikis, Bill Hader, Josh Gad

Ever wondered how the Angry Birds got angry? Sure you did! And here's the 3D animated film – featuring a voice cast of comedy heavy hitters – to explain all the avian rage issues.

The Meddler

OUT **MAY 19** / RATING **M** / **200 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Lorene Scafaria
CAST Susan Sarandon, Rose Byrne, J.K. Simmons, Jerrod Carmichael

An ageing widow from NYC (Sarandon) follows her daughter (Byrne) to LA after her husband dies and, as the title suggests, gets with some meddling, much like Scooby-Doo and his team busting a no-good criminal type.

X-Men: Apocalypse

OUT **MAY 19** / RATED **TBC** / **TBC MINS.**
DIRECTOR Bryan Singer
CAST Jennifer Lawrence, Sophie Turner, Olivia Munn, Oscar Isaac

Oscar Isaac paints himself blue to play ultimate X-baddie Apocalypse in this 1980s-set follow-up to the hugely successful *X-Men: Days Of Future Past*.

Alice Through The Looking Glass

OUT **MAY 26** / RATED **TBC** / **TBC MINS.**
DIRECTOR James Bobin
CAST Mia Wasikowska, Johhny Depp, Alan Rickman, Helena Bonham Carter

Director James Bobin (*The Muppets*, *Flight Of The Conchords*) helms Alice's latest encounter with Johnny Depp in full made-up kook mode.

The Nice Guys

OUT **MAY 26** / RATED **MA15+** / **116 MINS.**
DIRECTOR Shane Black
CAST Ryan Gosling, Matt Bomer, Russell Crowe, Kim Basinger, Ty Simpkins

As the creator of *Lethal Weapon*, Black defined action in the '80s and '90s; now the *Iron Man 3* helmer flashes back to the 1970s for this crime caper with Gosling and Crowe.



BATTLE



ROYALE

The Marvel Cinematic Universe is on the verge of tearing itself apart in *Captain America: Civil War*. Chris Evans, Robert Downey Jr. and directors Joe and Anthony Russo warn that things will never be the same again...

WORDS **HELEN O'HARA**



THIS IS LIKE A DRUNKEN FIGHT at a wedding," says director Anthony Russo. "They dredge up all those horrible things that have existed for years, and suddenly somebody throws a punch." The difference between what Auntie Doreen said about Our Sharon and the almighty feud that erupts in the third *Captain America* movie, *Civil War*, however, is that most nuptial knockdowns don't involve enough firepower to reduce entire cities to rubble.

With some fans dubbing it 'Avengers 2.5', *Civil War* features almost all the main, terrestrial Marvel characters, with newcomers like Black Panther, Ant-Man and the freshly rebooted Spider-Man more than making up for the sizeable holes left by Hulk and Thor. Not merely a sequel to one of the Marvel Cinematic Universe's finest films, 2014's *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, this will also prepare the ground for the two-part monster mash of *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018/'19).

No pressure, then, for the returning *Winter Soldier* directors, Joe and Anthony Russo, and third-time *Captain America* screenwriters Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely. "The scale is enormous," says Joe Russo. "From a character and storytelling standpoint, it's by far the largest movie we've done."

This won't be a faithful adaptation of the 2006-'07 comic crossover with which it shares a name — any more than *Age Of Ultron* was — but it asks the same question: who watches the watchmen? Or, more precisely, who orders these superheroes into action after the collapse of S.H.I.E.L.D. and the disastrous self-policing attempted by Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) in *Ultron*? Marvel Comics' *Civil War* revolved around a disaster caused by heroic irresponsibility as well as villainy. There, Iron Man led the subsequent drive to register superheroes with the government, while Captain America leapt off a S.H.I.E.L.D. helicarrier to resist this assault on personal liberty. Here, Iron Man remains on the side of the authorities, but it's the international Sokovian Accords, following the Ultron incident, that will govern the superheroes' deployment.

"*Civil War*, to me, was one of the coolest strings of the comic books," says Downey Jr. of his decision to join the film as neither the lead character, nor Avengers team-player but, arguably, its antagonist. "They were doing a third Cap film, and this was a way to super-charge it. At first I was like, 'Hey, I have plenty to do — I'm not trying to see how many other people's movies I can be involved in.' But honestly I have a creative fondness for Chris Evans — I was one of the voices in his ear when he was making the decision to join [*the Marvel Cinematic Universe*] — and it afforded an opportunity to get a glimpse at some of the future star players on the Marvel team, like Chadwick [*Boseman*] as Black Panther. So I got really excited."

Above: Team Iron Man line up for action. **Above right:** Sebastian Stan and Chris Evans on set with Joe and Anthony Russo. **Right:** These boots were made for walking, reckons Scarlett Johansson's Natasha Romanoff.

• ZADE ROSENTHAL © MARVEL 2016



Scratch me if you can: Frank Grillo returns as Crossbones.





"This film is an extreme shift. It's a psychological thriller." Joe Russo

The Russo brothers' last film, *Winter Soldier*, "changed elements of the Marvel Universe," as Joe puts it, referring to the destruction of S.H.I.E.L.D. and the revelation of Nazi splinter-group HYDRA's continued existence. "But the consequences of *Civil War* will have an even more significant impact," he says. "In *Civil War*, we're going to change the Marvel Cinematic Universe's psychology, and it's an extreme shift. *Winter Soldier* was a political thriller; this is a psychological thriller."

THERE IS DEFINITELY A weight to the drama *Empire* sees unfolding when we arrive on the *Captain America: Civil War* set in Berlin, during the summer of 2015. Today's scenes are shot beneath the city's Olympic Stadium, a stark neo-classical structure where, in 1936, Jesse Owens outran the Nazis' racist ideology. It might seem like an odd place to find a character who knocked out Adolf Hitler more than 200 times, but returning Cap to Germany was a deliberate choice by the Russos, to "bring the character full-circle", as Joe puts it.

Directly beneath what was once the dictator's box, a refurbished car park that serves as a private entrance for dignitaries has been repurposed to play a government office where Steve Rogers, Falcon (Anthony Mackie) and one of Downey Jr.'s "future star players", Black Panther, arrive to face Emily VanCamp's returning Agent Sharon Carter and Martin Freeman's Everett Ross.

In the comics, Ross is the US government's liaison to Wakanda and a frequent ally of Panther. Here, he's working for a 'Joint Counter Terrorism Centre', but it's a solid bet that he'll also appear in Panther's standalone film. The scene is intense: Sebastian Stan's Bucky is being rolled away in shackles for "psychological examination". Captain America and Falcon also seem to be in the authorities' bad books, and are led away to face person or persons unknown (our money's on William Hurt's Thaddeus Ross — no relation to Everett).

After wrapping the scene, Evans is the last one off set. He stands back to let others through the door first, a courtesy that echoes Steve Rogers himself. "It's beautiful playing a guy who just wants to be a good man," he says. "You can't help but take some of that home with you."

But somewhere along the way, the Captain and Iron Man have passed each another en route to the opposite ends of the spectrum of respect for authority. "We're counter-culture guys," says Joe Russo. "To take a character who's that symbolic and turn him counter-cultural was, to us, a devious and interesting way to approach a movie called *Captain America*."

Tony Stark, meanwhile, is haunted by guilt following that whole accidentally-created-a-monster-called-Ultron episode, and increasingly aware of the need to regulate extraordinary powers. It's a huge shift for the character who, in his second film, refused to share his technology with the government. Now, he's the one urging restraint and responsibility — and unlike the *Civil War* comics' Tony, the writers have worked very hard to make him at least as sympathetic as Steve.

"Hopefully you'll leave wondering if Steve and Tony are both acting in selfish interests," says Downey Jr., and reports ›



from early test screenings suggest audience loyalties are split. Anthony Russo describes Stark's journey in the movie as "fascinating… Robert and Chris are incredible. The conflict between the two of them is incredibly emotional and it's beautifully played out."

Part of their animosity is down to a clash between the high ideals of Steve's "greatest generation" mentality and the selfish Baby Boomer outlook of the narcissistic Tony. But more than that, there's an element of near-sibling rivalry. "[*Tony's father*] Howard Stark feels that Steve is one of the best things he ever did," McFeely explains. "So there must be a great deal of pressure when you grow up as Tony, hearing about Steve Rogers as the person you ought to be and you're not."

Evans agrees. "There's a history, no doubt, from Tony's point of view," he says. "I think that may be something Steve forgets at times, because to carry baggage from a self-serving point of view is kind of a foreign concept to him. But it is this sibling friction — and with families that's where you have the most love but it's where you have the most struggle, too."

ROGERS IS DRIVEN, at least in part, by his friendship with Bucky Barnes, who resurfaced in the last *Captain America* movie as Russian assassin The Winter Soldier. "There's a conflict between Tony and Steve, but the dynamic of Bucky pours gasoline on the open flame," says Evans. "I love putting Steve in situations where he doesn't know what to do. When you have a guy who refuses to bleed on people and puts himself last consistently, it can be a little dry. What makes these movies good is that they always try to give him a little bit of confusion — and in this movie there's a lot of uncertainty, and that's how the stakes have been raised."

It's the Bucky element that makes this, definitively, a *Captain America* rather than an *Avengers* movie. As The Winter Soldier, he may have murdered hundreds (including, the last film hinted, Howard Stark), but he did so while brainwashed.

"He'll never just be Bucky Barnes again," says Sebastian Stan, who plays the tortured veteran. "This movie, for him, is very much the good wolf and the bad wolf coming together — or maybe *not* coming together. So when is he triggered? When is he remembering things? He's trying to find out about himself, his past, and what sort of world he's in."

Joe Russo describes him as an "incredibly complicated character. He and Steve have the emotional connection of brothers — even more so because Bucky was all Steve had growing up. Bucky was his protector, and that dynamic shifted [*when Steve became Captain America*], and now it has shifted again. The Cap-Bucky story is a love story; he can't let go of his brother. *He* can reconcile Bucky's crimes, but other people have no emotional context for Bucky, and they need to point the finger. We have no idea if he's a hero or a villain. People are going to walk out arguing about that, too."

Clockwise from above: Cap goes underground; Sharon Carter (Emily VanCamp) and Everett Ross (Martin Freeman); Bucky Barnes (Sebastian Stan); Scarlet Witch (Elizabeth Olsen).









AS DOWNEY JR. PUTS IT, the conflict between characters means "the call sheet is split down the middle." The first big challenge for the Russos was handling what Anthony describes as "basically the cast of a Soderbergh movie" playing wildly popular characters.

"There's a very tough, complicated sequence that involves a great number of characters," says Joe. This was "the Splashdown", the almighty airport clash we glimpsed in the trailer. "There was a lot of character interaction, a lot of character moments, and you need to dig them all out." He and Anthony insist that figuring out everyone's motivations was more important to this on-screen conflict than the nitty-gritty of the action. As Anthony says, "Spectacle can only carry you so far. If you don't have character then it's empty spectacle and the movie starts to run out of gas pretty quickly. You can only watch so many explosions and unmotivated car crashes."

The second challenge, shared by writers Markus and McFeely, was that they needed to be careful, and inventive, about how they drew the battle lines between Team Iron Man and Team Cap.

Unsurprisingly, Anthony Mackie's Falcon quickly sides with his fellow ›

Extreme Measures

THE SOKOVIAN ACCORD, WHICH KICKS OFF *CIVIL WAR*, IS JUST THE LATEST HARSH ACT IN A LONG LINE OF MOVIE LEGISLATION



THX 1138 (1971)
THE LAW Sex is a crime, and mind-altering drugs are mandatory.
THE PUNISHMENT Offenders are chased by police robots with scary chrome faces, and "mindlocked".



Logan's Run (1976)
THE LAW At the age of 30, you die.
THE PUNISHMENT Death, via the ritual of "Carrousel": you get vaporised in a cross between the Coliseum and a giant salad-spinner.



Footloose (1984)
THE LAW No dancing! No rock music! No footloosing!
THE PUNISHMENT Confiscation of your Sunday shoes.



Demolition Man (1993)
THE LAW The Verbal Morality Statute, banning the public from using unwholesome language.
THE PUNISHMENT Fines, dispensed via tickets that double as toilet paper, which is useful.



Equilibrium (2002)
THE LAW Emotions are banned. Hence reading poetry, gawping at art or listening to music makes you a 'Sense Offender'.
THE PUNISHMENT A Grammaton Cleric will gun kata you to death.



The Purge (2013)
THE LAW Using the '28th amendment', the US government have legalised all crime for 24 hours a year.
THE PUNISHMENT You can't break this law, but can be killed by it. NICK DE SEMLYEN

The One-Shots

WILLIAM HURT'S THADDEUS ROSS IS BACK. WHAT HOPE FOR MARVEL'S OTHER BIG-NAME ONE-TIMERS?



TOMMY LEE JONES

Putting his intimidating bark and deadpan stare to good use as super-soldier-program boss Colonel Chester Phillips in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), Jones was left on the runway in the 1940s. His best chance of an encore is a flashback cameo. Well, either that or time travel.



CHRISTOPHER ECCLESTON

In *Thor: The Dark World* (2013), Eccleston subsumed himself in prosthetics as dark elf overlord Malekith. He's probably not in a rush to return to the make-up chair, and was definitively squished by his own spaceship at the climax. Yet villains have survived worse. Malekith could return... AS FLATMAN!



HUGO WEAVING

Another *First Avenger* alumnus, and another actor who performed villainy under prosthetics, as HYDRA-*führer* Red Skull. But he was disintegrated by the Tesseract, right? Or was he just teleported somewhere? One current fan theory suggests he's already returned, in a new form, in TV's *Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.*.



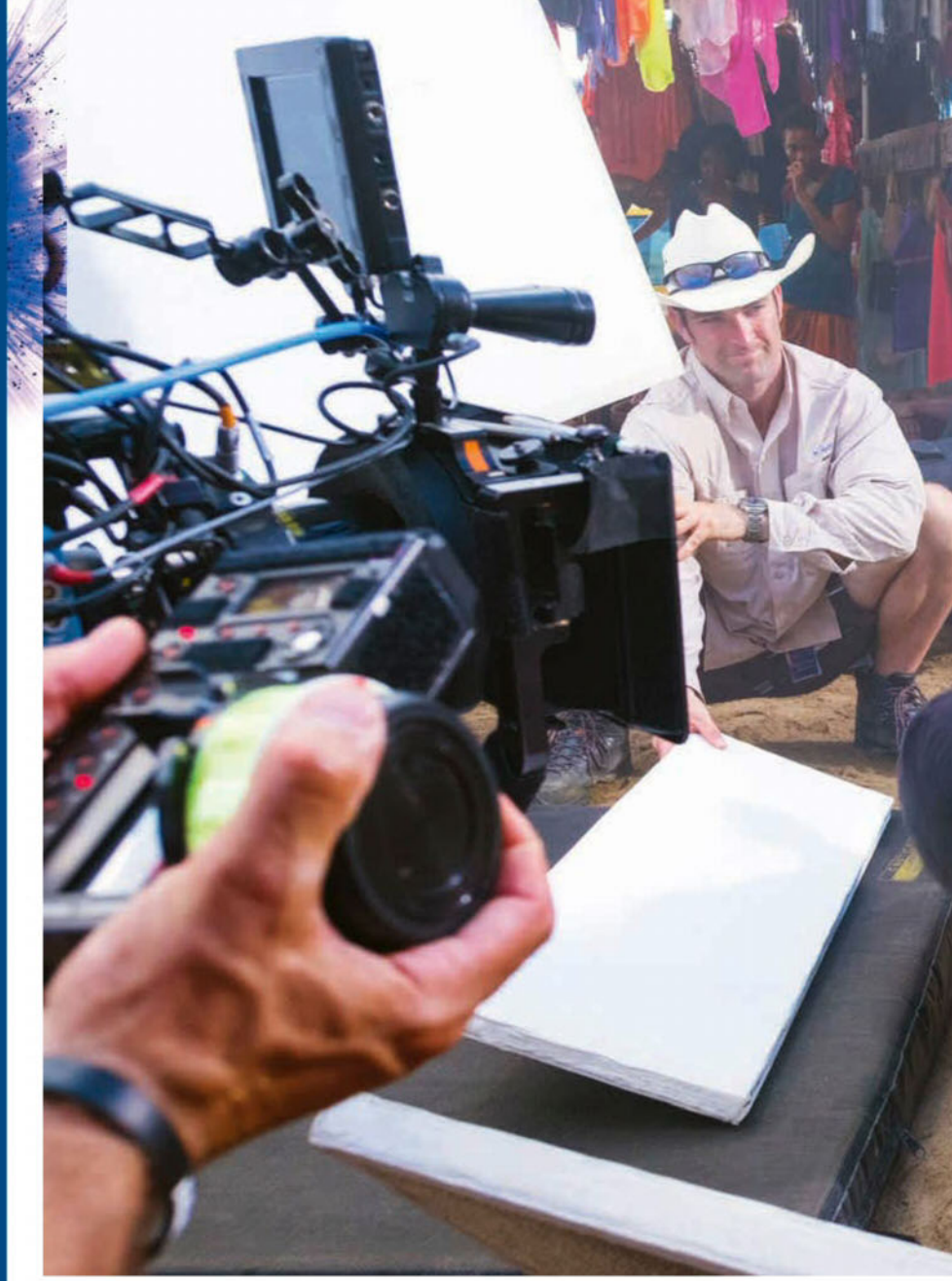
SAM ROCKWELL

Tony Stark's weaselly business rival Justin Hammer was imprisoned at the end of *Iron Man 2* (2010), giving him plenty of time to brew resentment, hatch an escape plan and find other Stark-haters he can pimp with advanced tech, just as he's done over and over in the *Iron Man* comic books.



JENNA COLEMAN

Think Karen Gillian is the only Doctor Who assistant to appear in the MCU? What about Jenna Coleman, who popped up in *The First Avenger* as Connie, one of Bucky's dates. Who's to say Thanos hasn't turned her into a space-assassin 'daughter', like Gillan's Nebula in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*? WHO'S TO SAY? DAN JOLIN



soldier. "Sam and Steve have become close confidants and good friends," says Mackie. "Steve is the leader but he definitely comes to Sam and bounces ideas off him." But Falcon and Bucky, nicknamed "Cap's two girlfriends" on set, are not his only allies. VanCamp's Sharon Carter — who is *actually* Cap's girlfriend in the comics, and perhaps in the future here — is, she says, "willing to go the distance to protect him".

If we can trust the posters and the airport conflagration we glimpsed in the trailer, Paul Rudd's Ant-Man and Jeremy Renner's Hawkeye also side with the rebels, as does Elizabeth Olsen's Scarlet Witch, returning from *Age Of Ultron*. "She's a complex person, and extremely powerful," says Joe Russo. "She doesn't really understand the depth of her power. I don't think anyone does. That can make her a frightening character, especially to the government. In this movie, we find her at the beginning under Cap's tutelage. He's showing her the ropes as an Avenger."

Siding with Stark, we find War Machine (Don Cheadle) and *Ultron*'s 'newborn' android, the Vision (Paul Bettany). He marries Scarlet Witch in the comics, but the pair are at odds here — victims of the Russos' delight in rending apart traditional pairings. Though, as, Anthony emphasises, "We worked hard to figure out very specific reasons why these characters would get pushed to one side or the other."

Black Panther also appears inclined to control the superhero threat (see page 52), and, despite her close allegiance to Steve in *The Winter Soldier*, so is Black Widow. "Our new challenge is that this universe is bigger than the Avengers," explains Scarlett Johansson. "There's a school of thought that it needs oversight and management, some kind of ground rules. That seems logical — though Cap and I have had a bad experience with 'The Man', so to speak." The sticking point for Natasha is Bucky. "Barnes is a total wildcard. He can't really be trusted because he's been psychologically



From top: Johansson punching low on set; Sam Wilson (Anthony Mackie), Steve Rogers (Chris Evans) and T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman); Iron Man (Downey Jr.), bruised but unbeaten.

compromised. He still poses a threat. I think that's how Natasha would see it."

The final key combatant here is Tom Holland's Spider-Man, returning to the Marvel Studios fold after a deal was struck with rights holders Sony. He comes in after the battle lines have been drawn, and forms a relationship with one character who, for now, the Russos won't identify. "Tom's unbelievable," says Joe. "We're very excited to present our vision of Spider-Man to the world. He was my favourite character growing up, so for a comic geek like me this is a real moment."





IF IT SEEMS LIKE THE RUSSOS, and Marvel, are taking a huge risk putting all these beloved characters at one another's throats, it is a calculated one.

"The only thing I ever have trepidation about is it getting stale," says Downey Jr., who's now been in the Marvel game for over eight years. "When I hear words like 'radical' and 'risky', that's what gets me up in the morning. Past a certain point you just gotta say, 'These are the basic tenets of what we're doing,' and then it's a huge experiment." Evans, portraying Rogers for the fifth time, agrees that the storytelling drives him forward. "It's Marvel, they give good scripts," he says. "I'd do this for free. Wait, don't print that!"

When *Empire* caught up with the Russos recently, they'd already had riotously successful test screenings and were beginning five days of pick-ups to finish off *Civil War*, with Evans, Downey Jr. and Gwyneth Paltrow's Pepper among those returning. Then, at some point in the next month, they'll start focusing on *Infinity War* in earnest. Markus and McFeely have already produced a first draft of that script after spending months breaking the story.

"It's an exciting time in the Marvel building," says McFeely. "Peyton Reed is in one corner [*working on* Ant-Man And The Wasp]; *Thor 3* is over in that corner. We're taking up the middle of the floor, *Panther* will be in another corner. *Spider-Man*, they're around. *Guardians 2* has already moved to Atlanta. It's ridiculous!"

Markus says he's especially looking forward to the broader scope of an *Avengers* film. "We've written three movies about a pretty stoic guy," he says, "and now we get to write for all the gang. But *Civil War* was a walk in the park compared to these other two. We're writing scenes for characters that haven't been cast yet…"

Joe Russo assures us there are substantial threads connecting the wars *Civil* and *Infinity*. "We wanted *Winter Soldier*, *Civil War* and the *Infinity War* films to have a strong through-line," he says. "We look at this movie as setting the stage for *Infinity War*, how it starts and what condition everybody's in."

That hints at significant fall-out from this battle, and Anthony Russo promises a "very dramatic ending that will be very controversial for a lot of people" — which hints at at least one character's death, potentially, and certainly a sudden interest in solo projects for the artists formerly known as The Avengers. What could ever get them back together? Our money is on either a really lucrative reunion tour, or a megalomaniac from outer space with purple skin. Let's see which turns up first…

***CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR* IS OUT NOW AND WILL BE REVIEWED NEXT ISSUE.**



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ROAR POWER

GET ON UP STAR CHADWICK BOSEMAN JOINS THE FRAY AS BLACK PANTHER – A VERY DIFFERENT KIND OF HERO FOR THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

WORDS **HELEN O'HARA**

CHADWICK BOSEMAN IS best known for losing himself in astonishingly convincing portrayals of real-life historical figures. He broke through as Jackie Robinson in 2013 baseball drama *42* and went on to embody Godfather Of Soul James Brown in *Get On Up* a year later. Both roles were, it turns out, good preparation for *Civil War*, which sees Boseman take on another groundbreaking historical figure: the first black superhero lead in comic books, Black Panther.

Created by writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby, Black Panther first appeared in the pages of *Fantastic Four* in July 1966 (predating Huey P. Newton's black nationalist movement of the same name by three months), before joining *The Avengers* in 1968. Decked in sleek, high-tech combat armour and possessing catlike agility and senses, he faced off against the shady likes of Erik Killmonger, Man-Ape and the *Age Of Ultron*-cameoing Ulysses Klaw (Andy Serkis).

So, in contrast to James Brown and Jackie Robinson, this character does spend rather more of his time leaping around and between buildings. As is clear when *Empire* meets Boseman in his *Civil War* trailer, where we find him still recovering from the previous day's rooftop action scene, which he had to shoot in 37°C heat while wearing his full Black Panther suit.

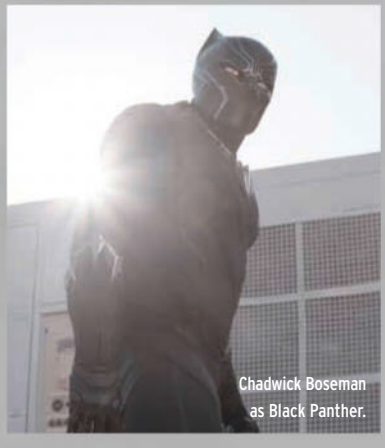
Despite such sweltering action sequences, Boseman insists that Black Panther is "not a superhero" in the usual sense. Amid the grand-scale tussle that is the Civil War, he stands apart. "I'm not on anybody's team," says Boseman. "It's my political mission to tame it and get it under control."

Director Joe Russo admits that introducing "a character we love and who people have high expectations for" proved a challenge, especially "in a movie that has so much going on. But it actually works out really well. We found a very interesting place in the narrative for him, where he's his own third-party radical."

So this latest introduction to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, real-name T'Challa, is to Boseman, at least, more grounded than your average costumed crime-fighter — he's a political figure. And royalty, to boot. "T'Challa is a prince of Wakanda," he explains. "All heroes have a weight on their shoulders, but there will eventually be a difference in what I have to carry politically and socially."

Joe and Anthony Russo believe this is an appropriate Marvel instalment in which to introduce Black Panther, as they see some similarity to the big guy in red, white and blue. "Because he's an emblem and a representative of his country in the way that Captain America is," says Anthony Russo. "But in a different way too: Cap is an everyman who became elevated because of his virtues and Panther is a prince. So it's an interesting contrast."

In an emphatic counter to too many African stereotypes, Wakanda is one of the world's most advanced nations, home to most of the world's stock of the 'vibranium' which makes up Cap's shield. "The idea of Wakanda is sort of, what if Timbuktu hadn't been conquered?" says Boseman, who also invented his own accent for the character, figuring out where on the continent the fictional country would lie. "I basically listened to people and picked what sounded cool, since it's not a specific place. It's in the southern, central part of Africa. The attitude, the musicality, is my preference for the character. It has to fit his dignity."



Chadwick Boseman as Black Panther.

Of course, this *is* Marvel, and there are many 'super' elements to this hero. In the comics, Black Panther combines mystical powers with high-tech accessories. The latter are definitely presented in *Civil War*: vibranium is woven into his suit to provide extra protection, and has been shaped into 'claws' so sharp they can cut through other metals. There are also, Boseman teases, further "properties to the suit that you'll see at a later date". He won't confirm whether his character has already undergone the initiation ceremony that imbues him with superhuman senses, strength and speed, but it's a fair bet he'll have swallowed his magic brew by the end of the *Black Panther* solo movie, to be directed by *Creed*'s Ryan Coogler ("He's dynamic, he loves the character, he's such a great choice to direct that movie," says Joe Russo).

Each Marvel solo adventure so far has had its own distinct tone, and the same will be true of *Black Panther*. "There is one genre I think Black Panther lends himself to, but I'm not going to say," Boseman tells us. "*Black Panther* is a superhero movie but it's still character-driven. That's my assessment so far. You identify with what you know, you have the fantasy of this other world but that can only hold you so far. It's what's real that is going to hold you in the end."

BLACK PANTHER IS OUT IN 2018.

• ADAM FEDDERLY/CORBIS OUTLINE

AMERICAN ID



WHY A PATRIOTIC FIGURE CREATED TO BASH NAZIS IN 1940 REMAINS ONE OF MARVEL'S MOST INTERESTING HEROES

WORDS DORIAN LYNSKEY
ILLUSTRATION JOHN ROYLE



THE AMERICAN NIGHTMARE IS A 1990 STORY IN WHICH CAPTAIN AMERICA TEAMS

up with Daredevil to protect a smalltown inventor from the FBI and government goons. Voicing the opinions of *Daredevil*'s unapologetically liberal writer Ann Nocenti, he opened his heart to the Man Without Fear about the sins of Reagan and Bush's America and fretted, "How can they expect me to continue to wear the flag of a country that does such things?" Even Daredevil was taken aback. One reader was so unhappy with this bleeding-heart Cap that he sent a curt letter to the editor: "Get the commie off the book."

People take Captain America very seriously. In 2007, writer Ed Brubaker said, "What I found is that all the really hardcore left-wing fans want Cap to be giving speeches on the street corner against the George W. Bush administration, and all the really right-wing fans want him to be over in the streets of Baghdad, punching out Saddam Hussein." This divide wasn't new. The 75-year history of the character is an argument about America itself. Over the years, Captain America has been a clean-cut war hero, a Red-basher, a bitterly disillusioned liberal, a jingoistic thug and a dissident freedom fighter, and he still hasn't been nailed down. Like the country he represents, he contains multitudes.

By rights, a square-jawed all-American who was created in December 1940 to battle the Nazis should by now be hopelessly square. He's not anxious about girls and money like Spider-Man, tortured by grief and guilt like Daredevil, hounded like the X-Men or lonely like the Hulk. He's a good guy, and good guys normally write white. But the writers who have kept him alive in comic books and, recently, on screen show that it's not easy to be good when you represent a country that frequently isn't. His faith in America, and therefore his own identity, is constantly being knocked down and rebuilt. It was all much simpler in the beginning, when the USA was the hero of the free world, the enemy was obvious and Cap was a fantasy of underdog empowerment cooked up by two Jewish New Yorkers.

In 1940, Martin Goodman was the ambitious boss of Timely Publications, the precursor to Marvel Comics. His biggest characters, the Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner, were licensed from another company and he wanted one of his own. So he asked freelance writer Joe Simon, who asked a talented young artist from the Lower East Side slums named Jacob Kurtzberg, better known as Jack Kirby. Simon and Kirby struck out a few times before creating a super-patriot heavily influenced by MLJ Comics' star-spangled hero The Shield. He was Steve Rogers, an orphaned, working-class, Irish-American art student from Kirby's neighbourhood who was too sickly to enlist in the military and so volunteered to receive an experimental "super-soldier" serum that enabled him to fight for the American way. Simon toyed with the name Super American before settling on Captain America. "There›



Clockwise from top: Hitler on the cover of *Captain America #1* (cover date: March 1941); Issue 109, January 1969, in which Cap reveals how he came to be; The inventor of the Super-Soldier Serum with his charge; A flashback to Cap during World War II in *The Ultimates* #1 (March 2002) – note Bucky, bottom right; Cap creators Jack Kirby and Joe Simon.
Right: Cap and sidekick Rick Jones (during a brief stint as Bucky) attack Hydra in issue #113, May 1969.

• COURTESY OF MARVEL, THE JOE SIMON ESTATE AND THE JACK KIRBY ESTATE

were too many 'Supers' around," Simon remembered. "There weren't a lot of captains in comics."

Simon, Kirby and Goodman were all the sons of immigrants; they didn't take America for granted. What's more, Simon and Kirby were genuinely disgusted by Hitler and made their hero an idealistic, socially conscious patriot who went to war to protect the weak. As Mark D. White puts it in *The Virtues Of Captain America: Modern-Day Lessons On Character From A World War II Superhero*, he believes "American ideals apply to everyone — not just all Americans, but all people around the world".

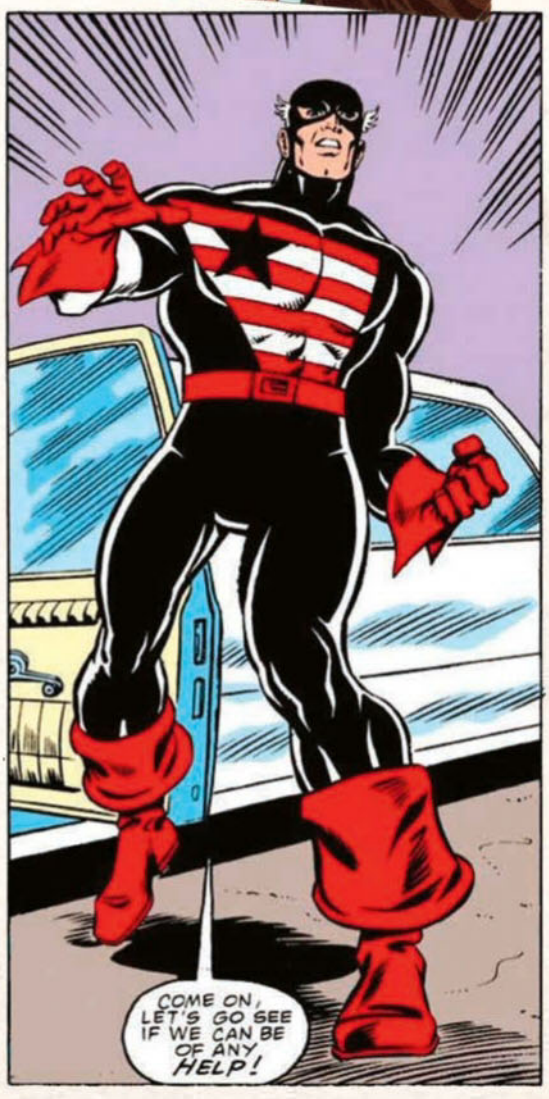
The US wouldn't enter the war until Pearl Harbour in December 1941, but Timely's heroes were already doing their bit. The cover of *Captain America* #1, which hit the newsstands shortly before Christmas 1940 (although sporting a cover date of March 1941), depicted Cap whomping Hitler himself while Nazi bullets pinged off his shield. The scenes in *Captain America: The First Avenger* in which he's forced to be a propaganda pin-up echo the inspirational impact of the comic book. Each issue sold around one million copies, outperforming even *Time* magazine, fans called themselves the Sentinels Of Liberty, and Cap continued to plague the Nazis and Japanese right up to VJ Day. "The villain came first," Simon said. "Hitler was the perfect bad guy — better than any we could have invented. Captain America was created to be his ultimate foil."

Goodman was not quite so idealistic when he revived the character as a Cold Warrior in 1953, at the height of the Red Scare, billing him as "Captain America, Commie Smasher!" When Stan Lee, the former Timely office boy who became the creative dynamo behind Marvel, brought Cap back in 1964, he ignored those stories, explaining that Rogers had been frozen in North Atlantic ice since 1945 and defrosted in a new era. When *Howard The Duck* creator Steve Gerber attended a pitch meeting with TV producer Fred Silverman in 1980, he waxed lyrical about Captain America, calling him "a man out of time". An unimpressed Silverman replied, "You know, we ain't doing Ibsen here." But this out-of-time quality is what makes Rogers so interesting in the Avengers movies, his old-fashioned nobility contrasting with Iron Man's glib cynicism and Black Widow's flinty realism. He doesn't quite fit in.

After a strong start, the reborn Captain America became unfashionable as the '60s wore on. What did good ol' Steve Rogers have to say to the generation of Woodstock and My Lai, increasingly convinced that the biggest threat to American ideals was the country's own government? "It was taking place during the Vietnam War, and here was this guy wearing a flag on his chest, and everybody was embarrassed," said writer Steve Englehart, who took over the book in 1972.

One of Englehart's storylines was an obvious analogy for Watergate, with Cap the victim of a smear campaign orchestrated by Number One, the leader of terrorist organisation the Secret Empire. It ends with Number One unmasked as a top government official and committing suicide in the White House. Englehart assured Marvel that Number One, whose face was never seen, wasn't meant to be Richard Nixon, but of course he was. Why else would he boast, "High political office didn't satisfy me! My power was still too constrained by legalities!"? And who would feel more betrayed by a crooked commander-in-chief than the war hero who wore the flag on his chest?







Top left: Steve Rogers's first appearance as Nomad in *Captain America* #180 (December 1974).
Left: Mark Gruenwald's retired Rogers returns as 'The Captain' in #337 (January 1988).
Above and right: The death of Captain America, as depicted in Mark Millar's *Civil War* (2007).



• © MARVEL

Rogers was so disillusioned that he renounced Captain America and fought crime as Nomad before picking up the shield again, deciding that defending his country didn't mean obeying his government. Englehart's work later influenced *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, the Russo brothers' homage to the trust-nobody paranoid thrillers of the 1970s.

During the Reaganite '80s, Cap was a wary patriot, conscious of America's flaws as well as it strengths, suspicious of power, battling shady generals and renegade CIA agents. Writer Mark Gruenwald had Rogers temporarily resign again after he was ordered to work directly for the government, which replaced him with the more pliable Super-Patriot. "I cannot represent the American government; the President does that," Rogers loftily proclaimed. "I must represent the American people. I represent the American Dream…" In a deleted scene from *The Avengers*, Joss Whedon referenced this sceptical incarnation of Captain America (his favourite Avenger), having him talk to old flame Peggy Carter about "loss of the idea of community, loss of health care and welfare and all sorts of things."

There were limits, though. In 1984 left-leaning writer J.M. DeMatteis had an audacious plan for the 300th issue: Captain America would throw away his shield and renounce violence for good after the death of his Nazi nemesis the Red Skull. In Sean Howe's book *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*, DeMatteis reveals that he intended to turn Cap into a global peace activist, aggravating both his own government and fellow superheroes, before being assassinated by his wartime sidekick Bucky. The mantle of Captain America would pass to Black Crow, a Native American superhero, thus making the role represent the America that predated the pilgrim settlers. A pacifist Rogers was too much for Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, who freaked out and rewrote the issue, causing DeMatteis to quit in disgust. *Get the commie off the book.*

Captain America continued to evolve, in sometimes unsavoury directions. In 2003, writer Mark Millar turned Cap into a belligerent post-9/11 hard man who beat a foe to a bloody pulp while hollering, "You think this letter on my head stands for France?" But just three years later, in the *Civil War* storyline that inspired the new Captain America movie, Millar backtracked and made him an instinctive rebel, leading a group of guerrilla Avengers against the establishment yes-men headed by Iron Man. To Captain America, the authoritarian Superhero Registration Act was simply un-American. *Civil War* ended with Cap shot to death (or, this being one of Marvel's most cherished characters, "death") on the steps of a courthouse.

Even if the movie adaptation follows suit, marking the end of Chris Evans's tenure, and perhaps of Steve Rogers, that doesn't mean there will be no more Captain America movies. Across the decades, more than a dozen different characters have taken the job of Captain America when Rogers resigned, died or was otherwise indisposed. In the comic books the current shield-holder is Sam Wilson, formerly known as The Falcon.

As for creator Joe Simon, he lived long enough to see Captain America "killed" in *Civil War*. "It's a hell of a time for him to go," he told the *New York Daily News*. "We really need him now." He died in 2011, aged 98, shortly after the release of *Captain America: The First Avenger*, knowing his creation was in safe hands. He might not be the stuff of Ibsen, but the "man out of time" never grows old. E

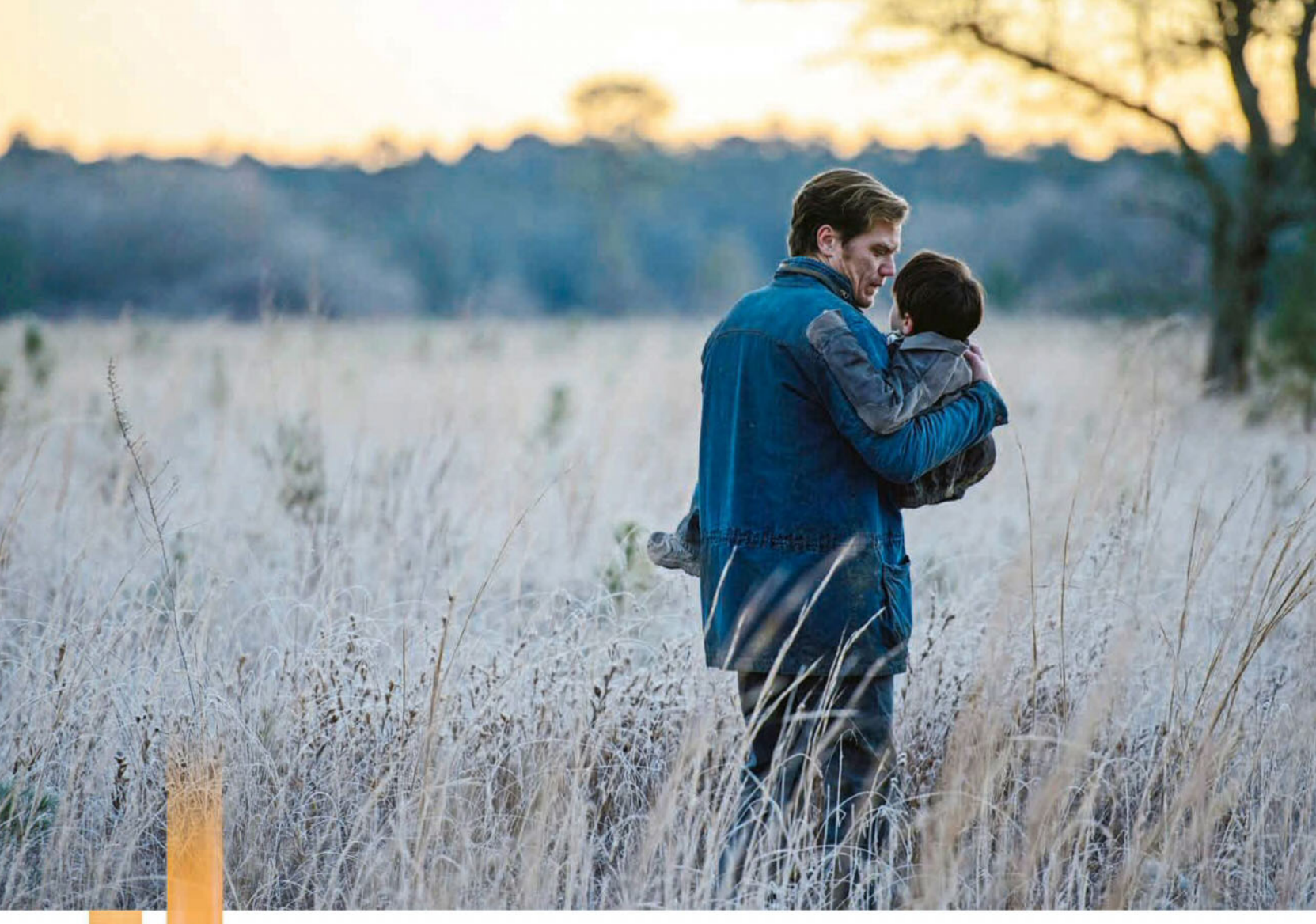




THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

How indie wunderkind **Jeff Nichols** crafted a blockbuster-rivalling sci-fi thriller without compromising his vision

WORDS **DAMON WISE**



Michael Shannon's Roy with his superpowered son Alton (Jaeden Lieberher).

Jeff Nichols likes to compare *Midnight Special* to a matryoshka doll — those wooden Russian nesting figurines that open up to reveal smaller and smaller versions of themselves. Except this one goes in reverse. "It starts with a kind of indie feel," he explains, "and then it gets progressively bigger and bigger — until it practically falls off the edges of the frame."

After three rural dramas set in his home state of Arkansas, the last one being the Matthew McConaughey-starring *Mud* (2012), it's about time Nichols, 37, entered the big league, and his latest is his most ambitious movie to date. A smart, sci-fi-skewed chase thriller, it aims for the throwback vibe of the films he grew up with and loved. It has the warm synth fuzz of John Carpenter's romantic sci-fi *Starman* and the retro lens flare of vintage Spielberg. But *Midnight Special* not only speaks the language of the modern blockbuster, it also fits snugly into Nichols's existing filmography; while there are shoot-outs, car chases and strange alien elements, he made sure, every step of the way, to never forget his roots.

"YOU HAVE TO FILL UP THE TANK"

While finishing his last movie, *Mud*, Nichols found himself with no ideas in reserve for the first time since graduating. As Mark Twain, one of his heroes, used to say, "You have to fill up the tank," so, looking back, he noticed a theme running through his projects: love. His first, 2007's *Shotgun Stories*, about a deadly small-town blood feud, "is about love between brothers — a deep love, and when one is taken away it's painful." The love in *Take Shelter* (2011), about a depressive father tormented by visions of the apocalypse, "is about marriage and commitment", while *Mud* is about "fleeting teenage love" and the cyclical nature of heartbreak. "I'm dealing with all these personal feelings in my life," he says, "and I use the films as a way to exorcise them."

The inspiration for *Midnight Special* was another kind of love. "My son, when he was about a year old, started to have a seizure, and my wife and I flipped out. We threw him in the car, I was holding him — no seatbelt — and we ran through red lights as we drove to the hospital. We were runnin' through the hospital and I was yellin', 'My baby can't breathe…!'" It turned out to be a febrile seizure, not life-threatening but scary all the same. "What it very pointedly made me understand," he says, "is that my life is no longer my own, and now that I have a child, there is a piece of me out in the world that I have no control over. So as a filmmaker I thought, 'I gotta talk about *that*.' Because that's the most intense fuckin' feeling I've had in my entire life."

"IT'S ABOUT BELIEF IN SOMETHING YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND"

Nichols was a child of the '80s, a boom time for sci-fi, but in particular the subgenre in which The Man was the bad guy. "I really looked at those films — specifically government sci-fi chase films like *Starman*, *Close Encounters* and *E.T.* — looking structurally at how the narratives unfolded, and also the aesthetic of those films, the colours, the lens flares, the general feeling and tone," he says. "I also noticed that the aliens weren't necessarily malevolent creatures. These stories are to do with us trying to understand an outsider."

When it came to casting the lead, Nichols's first instinct was to turn to his regular leading man, Michael Shannon,







Top: Jeff Nichols on location, directing Joel Edgerton and Shannon. **Above:** Adam Driver's Sevier and Edgerton's Lucas. **Right:** Great power comes with great stress for Alton.

who claims the director initially skipped the sci-fi bit of the pitch. "Jeff just described it as a chase movie," Shannon tells us. "He said, 'I'm writing this thing with you in a car, being chased.' And that was it. He didn't even mention the boy."

The boy is Alton Meyer (Jaeden Lieberher), a child with special powers who has been snatched away from a cult by his father, Roy (Shannon). The cult wants the boy back, but the government, which fears his explosive supernatural powers make him a threat to national security, is already on the case, in the form of Adam Driver's intuitive NSA agent, Sevier. Meanwhile, Roy, aided by his friend Lucas (Joel Edgerton) and Alton's mother Sarah (Kirsten Dunst), believes the boy has a secret destiny that they must help him to fulfil — even though they don't know what it is. "It's about belief in something you don't understand," says Nichols. "What would *you* do if you knew your child was bound for somewhere you couldn't follow?"

"MICHAEL SHANNON IS A RAW NERVE"

In the flesh, there seems little to connect Jeff Nichols and the actor who has appeared in all his films so far: where Nichols is garrulous, literate and boyish, given to grinning from ear to ear, Shannon projects the intensity of a human storm cloud, tall, taciturn and darkly foreboding. Nevertheless, Shannon has become the director's unlikely alter ego.

"Y'know, I began writing these parts not knowing Mike real well," Nichols says. "I was just writing versions of myself, and then for some reason casting him as me. I've always seen Mike, from *Shotgun Stories* on, as this hard-to-read, tough person who is extremely sensitive and extremely emotional. Oddly enough, that's how I see him as a person in real life now, the more I've gotten to know him."

He describes Shannon as "a raw nerve. It makes all the sense in the world that he'd play this part, which to me is very emotional. He's just a guy who wants to protect his family, which seems to be a recurring theme for me. I know everyone's always gonna look at Mike as the bad guy, 'cause that's the easy play. But he's great at that too. Mike Shannon can pretty much do anything."

Casting Shannon also gave Nichols access to the coffers of Warner Bros., home to indie-turned-A-list directors like Christopher Nolan and Tim Burton, which actually bankrolled the film for the bargain budget of just under $20 million.

"There were a couple of reasons I went to Warner Bros., but one of the main ones was because I thought they'd understand Mike," Nichols says. "They'd already, to a degree, invested in him, in terms of making him one of the main characters in *Man Of Steel*, so my hope was that they'd get it. Luckily they did."

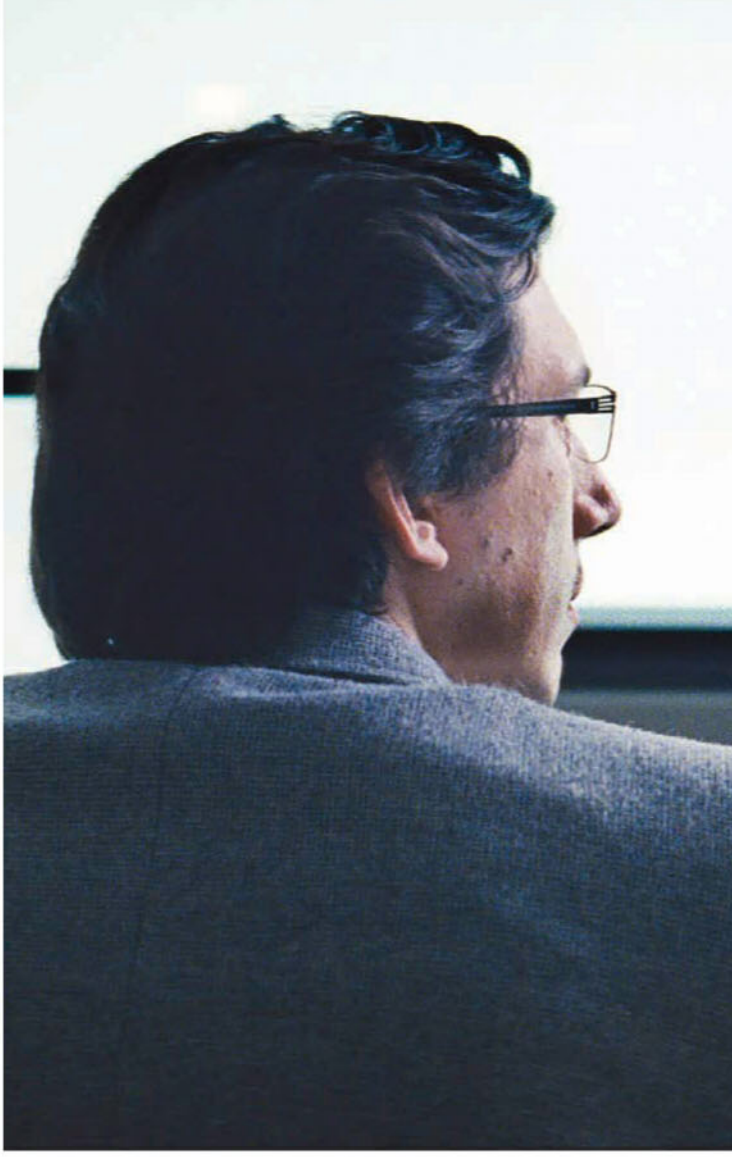
"I'M A SUCKER FOR FLATTERY"

Although *Mud* came in at an even more economical $10 million, Nichols landed a peak, pre-Oscar Matthew McConaughey and post-Oscar Reese Witherspoon in two of its leading roles. This one combines stars from *Man Of Steel*, *Spider-Man*, *Exodus* and *The Force Awakens*. Nichols has proved a master of drawing in big-name casts on small-scale movies.

The secret, says Nichols's long-time producer Sarah Green, is a mixture of two things. "Firstly, the material speaks for itself," she says. "Jeff is an extremely good writer and the scripts read really well. And then, when you meet him, you immediately feel comfortable. You know you're talking to a guy who understands filmmaking and knows how to talk to actors. If they have any questions, a meeting always does the trick." ›







Nichols puts much of his success in attracting A-list casts down to luck. "I've been really fortunate not to encounter any bad actors, in terms of prima donnas," he says, "and I really respond to that. One, because I'm a sucker for flattery. But, two, because they wanna do the work."

He cites Dunst, who auditioned for Roy's estranged wife Sarah, herself a fugitive from the cult. "She put herself on camera and we were like, 'Wow, that does *not* look like Kirsten Dunst.' She had no make-up on, she looked kinda rough, and she looked like the part. She just really wanted to do it — and that goes a really long way with me."

Adam Driver, he admits, was another happy accident. "That was a role I couldn't figure out. I wanted to combine Richard Dreyfuss from *Jaws* and François Truffaut from *Close Encounters* to create this weird character. We were at Warner Bros. when somebody mentioned Adam, and I didn't know much about him. I hadn't seen much of *Girls*, so I started looking into him. We got on the phone and, very surprisingly, he knew about my films, and he just said yes. I didn't know this guy, but I think he is going to be one of the biggest movie stars in the world. I feel like we are a small blip on a very large radar for that guy."

"I THOUGHT, 'HOW WOULD THAT *REALLY* LOOK?'"

Despite tackling a cinematic genre that traditionally demands big budgets, Nichols took the same factual approach that he did with his low-budget dramas. "I tried to take the same care, even with the fantastical elements," he says. "How would that *really* look, how would that really play out?"

Putting realism first meant there was little temptation to go crazy with CGI. Shannon, an actor who's worked with everyone from Werner Herzog to Michael Bay, describes the process of making *Midnight Special* as "organic".

"We were never on a green screen or anything, we were pretty much always on location," he says. "We were out in nature, in the elements, and it was beautiful. Even though it has that science fiction element, it's still very much of the earth, which is one of the things I love about Jeff and his movies and working with him — he has a very strong connection to nature, which I appreciate."

While watching the pennies was primarily Sarah Green's responsibility, she says Nichols was "mindful" that he needed to be careful about how they were spent. And with the budget they had, he couldn't rely on his VFX artists to do everything digitally. As a result, the effects are partly computer-generated, partly in-camera. In pre-production, Nichols meticulously planned out his car chases with stunt co-ordinator Scott Rogers, using toy cars on a desktop. And for the blue light that pours from Alton Meyer's eyes, he took an equally practical approach.

"We had these goggles with high-powered LEDs in the lenses, that were made between the prop guys and the visual-effects folks, that actually lit up on the set," Green tells us. "Of course, they were enhanced in post-production. But it created the effect on the set sufficiently for the whole thing to work."

Enlisting the LA-based Hydraulx VFX team, run by brothers Greg and Colin Strause, who created *Take Shelter*'s apocalyptic nightmares, Nichols also consulted 'world builder' Alex McDowell, a new media artist who, among other things, helped conceptualise the world of *Minority Report*. Their work helps take the film into its overtly fantastical final act, albeit with effects that respect the naturalism of Nichols's original intent. "There were certainly moments when the actors had

Clockwise from top left: Alton with his goggles; Unleashing his superpowers; With on-screen parents Shannon and Kirsten Dunst.



to react to things that weren't there," says Green. "But we were in practical locations, so everything else *was* there. The ground under their feet was there, the thing they had to possibly escape into — that was all real. It was a good, straightforward mix."

"I NEVER KNOW HOW MY MOVIES ARE GOING TO DO"

Nichols seems very relaxed for a man facing potentially the biggest box-office hit of his career, a movie which you would imagine other directors anxiously treating as their big studio calling card. Indeed, rather than holding out for any offers to come his way, Nichols has already shot and wrapped his next film, *Loving*, the story of a mixed-race couple (Edgerton and Ruth Negga) who challenged the racist laws of Virginia in the 1950s by getting married. In contrast to its predecessor, it is defiantly non-mainstream. "It's not a big career plan," says Green, adding that while he doesn't rule out a return to studio work, "we just work on a case-by-case basis."

Nichols says he never knows how his movies are going to perform. "With *Take Shelter*, I was anxious about the world and anxious about the film. I just kept waiting for the bad reviews. Luckily not too many came. But *Mud* did great. It made money. Real people liked that movie, not just the film Illuminati, and for whatever reason, they keep talking about it."

Regardless, he's proud of *Midnight Special*. Despite the extent of his ambition and the size of his budget — not to mention the involvement of a major studio — he stuck to his resolve and didn't compromise.

"They do these screenings — they call 'em 'friends and family screenings' — at the studio, where you try to get some feedback," he says, "but it's kind of insulated to the community at Warner Bros.. I saw a note card from one and it said, 'I can't believe Warner Bros. is making this film.' I *think* they mean it as a compliment! But they've been great, man. They let us do our thing and supported us every step of the way. So if people don't like the movie — which is entirely possible — they're not likin' a Jeff Nichols film. It's not because of some weird outside influence."

He laughs. "That's the footing I wanna be on."

MIDNIGHT SPECIAL IS OUT NOW AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 36.

CARPENTER COVERS

MIDNIGHT SPECIAL IS A TRIBUTE TO JOHN CARPENTER'S _STARMAN_. HERE ARE MORE RIFFS ON JC'S OEUVRE...



THE HATEFUL EIGHT (2016)

Tarantino cast the star of *The Thing*, as well as using its music cues and ambience. "It's the only movie I showed the cast," he says, adding, "And *Reservoir Dogs* was very much influenced by *The Thing*."



SCREAM (1996)

Carpenter directed buddy Wes Craven in 1993's *Body Bags*; three years later, Craven littered *Scream* with references to *Halloween*, from Billy Loomis's surname to a glimpse of the film on a TV.



LOCKOUT (2012)

Not so much an affectionate tribute to *Escape From New York* as an aggressive rip-off. This Luc Besson sci-fi film has so many similarities to the 1981 classic that Carpenter sued. And won.



GHOSTS OF MARS (2001)

Carpenter pays homage to himself when Pam Grier's character asks, "Who goes there?" (The title of the story *The Thing* was based on.) It's also basically a retelling of *Assault On Precinct 13*. NICK DE SEMLYEN



X

APOCALYPSE NOW

THE SIXTH X-MEN MOVIE SEES SAGA-ORIGINATOR BRYAN SINGER PUSHING THE MUTANT MAYHEM TO TRULY EPIC LEVELS, AND INTRODUCES ITS BIGGEST VILLAIN YET: THE APTLY NAMED APOCALYPSE

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT**





MAGNETO. It's always Magneto. Since 2000, when Bryan Singer first turned the X-Men from comic book heroes into a big-screen franchise, numerous villains have attempted to terrorise Professor Charles Xavier and his team of mutants over the course of five movies. But in the end, whether it's Kevin Bacon's Sebastian Shaw, or Peter Dinklage's Bolivar Trask, or the Sentinels, they've always been superseded by one man. It always comes down to Magneto, standing alone, indomitable, sneering at the X-Men. Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough.

So, as Singer and his writer/producer Simon Kinberg were dotting the Xs and crossing the Xs on 2014's *Days Of Future Past*, in which you-know-who ultimately, once again, becomes the true villain of the piece, they started looking ahead to the next X-instalment. And there was one thing they knew they wanted to do: introduce a new nemesis so powerful, so domineering, that the focus would finally shift away from the metal-bending menace in the purple helmet.

Scour through the X-Men's rogues gallery, built up over 50-plus years of the Marvel comic book, and you'd find plenty of viable candidates. But there was only one Apocalypse.



Michael Fassbender's Magneto, post-Four Horsemen augmentation.

Created in 1986 by writer Louise Simonson and artist Jackson Guice for the pages of *X-Factor* (not the TV talent show but a comic which turned the original X-Men team into, essentially, mutant detectives), Apocalypse is a noteworthy foe for all kinds of reasons. He's no pushover in the powers department. He has a striking look: all cables, muscles and blue-grey skin. He surrounds himself with powerful bodyguards known as the Four Horsemen. He has a Darwinist ideology that means trouble for humans and mutants alike. "I think there was a great similarity in terms of character, agenda and thematics in Sebastian Shaw, in *X-Men: First Class*, and Magneto," says Singer. "But with Apocalypse, it's a much more mythic kind of villain."

But what really appealed to Singer was Apocalypse's background. Born in Egypt (his real name is En Sabah Nur; Apocalypse is just a nickname given to him by his gym buddies), he's incredibly ancient. In fact, he's the first mutant, bestowed with a God complex so huge he thinks he might actually be the real thing. "I'm fascinated by religion and cults and the cult of personality," explains Singer, sitting behind his desk in his Montreal production office. "And ›

TEAM X

SOPHIE TURNER *is* JEAN GREY

Are you an actor? Do you want to increase your chances of appearing in an X-Men movie? Then there's one sure-fire way to catch Bryan Singer's eye: appear in *Game Of Thrones*. With Peter Dinklage (aka Tyrion Lannister) having played *Days Of Future Past*'s chief rotter, Bolivar Trask, Singer has raided Westeros again for *Apocalypse*, casting Sansa Stark herself, Sophie Turner, as the new Jean Grey. "I met Bryan in London," recalls Turner. "He was super-jetlagged, but when he saw my CV he was like, 'Fucking *Game Of Thrones*!' That perked him up. He's a big fan."

It's a surprise Turner wasn't already on Singer's wishlist for this youthful version of the powerful telepath, originally played by Famke Janssen. Tall, red of hair, formidable of disposition, she ticks all of Jean's boxes, something of which Turner was well aware. "I was getting a ton of tweets from people saying, 'You should audition for Jean Grey,'" she says. "I was going, 'I guess the red hair could work...'"

So began a casting process that Turner calls "the most painful three months of my life". Still, she can laugh about it now. "I wanted it so bad," she says. "Every day I was checking the internet to see if anyone had been cast. Then Bryan announced it on his Twitter, which was amazing." She had to endure a further delay while Fox and HBO tried to juggle her conflicting schedules to allow her to film both *Game Of Thrones* and *X-Men: Apocalypse* at the same time. "My loyalty lies with *Thrones*, but it was really good of *X-Men*," she says. "They squeezed themselves around it. I don't know how they did it."

Turner faces the intriguing prospect of having her life be dominated by both for the foreseeable future. "I must have a thing for signing long contracts," she laughs. "It's very difficult having to audition and only getting one in 20 roles. So when you get multiple movies or multiple seasons? Snap that up real quick!"



TEAM X

TYE SHERIDAN *is* CYCLOPS

Most actors, when they get cast in a comic book movie, spend weeks – months, even – pulling out all the stops in training, honing their bodies so they can perfectly recreate their character's signature combat move. That wasn't quite the case for Tye Sheridan. As Scott Summers, aka Cyclops, whose mutant power is shooting beams from his eyes, "I basically have to take my glasses off," he laughs. "And that's it. I didn't know if I was going to be able to handle it."

Of course, there's more to playing Cyclops than meets the energy-blasting eye. Though we encounter him as a troubled teenager, brought to Charles Xavier by his big brother Alex (Lucas Till), Scott will become the X-Men's leader, Jean Grey's beloved and – as Wolverine remarked of the James Marsden vintage in *X-Men* – "a dick".

"It's very much an origin story for Cyclops," says Sheridan. "We learn things about him we didn't know before. I do think he's an alpha dog. He likes to be on top."

Sheridan calls it "a dream to become part of this franchise", yet incredibly the *X-Men* franchise had passed him by. *Days Of Future Past* was the first one he saw, and as luck would have it, that was only a couple of days before he heard of auditions for *Apocalypse*. "When I was a kid, I never really watched a lot of films," he says. "I grew up in the middle of nowhere, basically. It wasn't super-easy to see films. I still haven't seen quite a few classics."

So far, the 19-year-old's tastes have gravitated towards the arthouse. Recently, he's worked with the likes of Jeff Nichols (*Mud*) and David Gordon Green (*Joe*), but he had a doozy of a debut: working on *The Tree Of Life* for one Terrence Malick. "I was 11 years old when I shot that film," recalls Sheridan, who played one of the sons of Brad Pitt and Jessica Chastain. "People think Terry's style is unique, and it is. But it's the first style I ever experienced, and in some odd sense, *that* will always feel normal to me."





what an ancient mutant would be, and what Apocalypse would consider himself and be considered by others. I thought it was a good character to explore. Plus, it's a cool title."

THAT COOL title, *X-Men: Apocalypse*, was announced in December 2013, months before *Days Of Future Past* was even completed. It was a bold move, one which showed the level of confidence Fox, Singer and Kinberg had in the direction of the franchise. *Days Of Future Past*, they felt, would take the series to a new level (correctly; the movie grossed $748 million worldwide) and trigger aggressive expansion. *Apocalypse* — the sixth 'main series' *X-Men* film to date — has been precision-tooled as the biggest in the series, with a budget in the region of $250 million. It has the widest scope, with the action flitting from Cairo to New York, East Berlin to Poland. And, thanks to the big blue baddie at its heart, it has the biggest bangs.

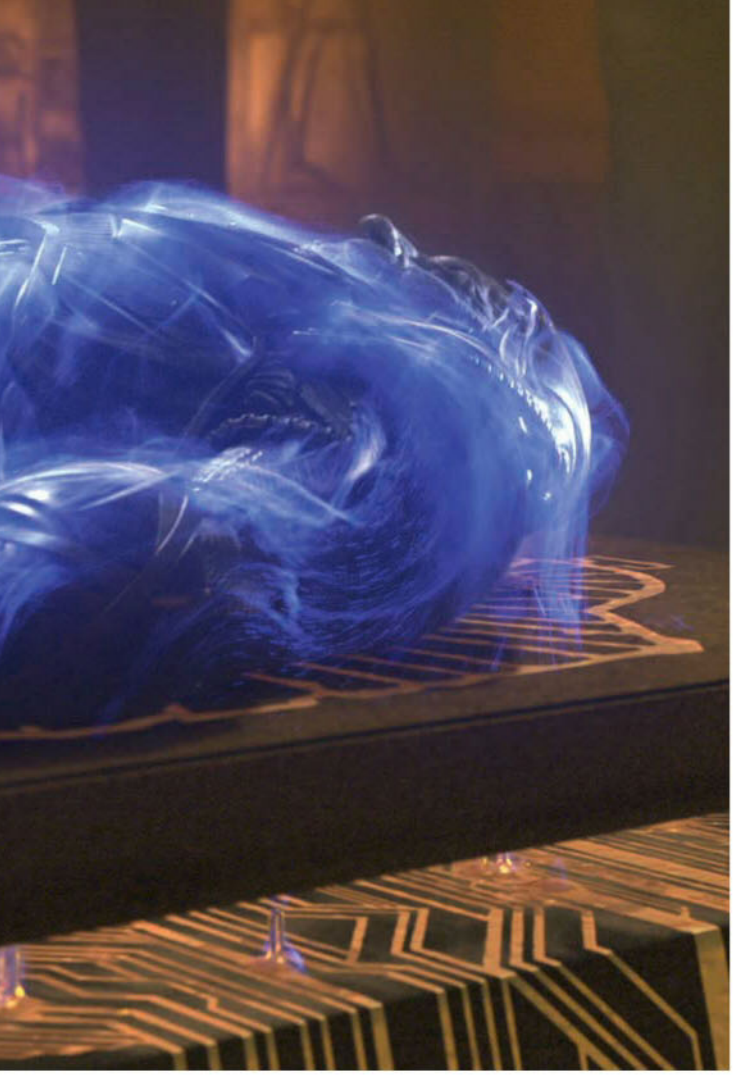
X-Men has never wanted for spectacle, even if that has mostly involved Magneto (yes, that guy again) lifting something heavy like the Golden Gate Bridge or the RFK Stadium and dropping it on something else. Each film has felt like a gradual progression — this is a series that has emphasised evolution over escalation. Why have people in capes punching each other through buildings when you can have a philosophical clash?

That will change with the arrival of Apocalypse, whose immense power will lead to mass destruction, but who also isn't above an old-fashioned debate with Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr. And his philosophy can be summed up thus: you can't make an omelette without breaking several billion eggs. "We've never done one of these movies where the threat from the villain is global and extinction-level. For the first time it is," says Kinberg. "If you have a movie about a character called Apocalypse, you have to embrace that it could actually *be* the apocalypse."

It's not so much a case of *Apocalypse Now*, though, more *Apocalypse Then*. As with *X-Men: First Class* and *Days Of Future Past*, this movie is set earlier than the original X-trilogy. Jumping forward a decade from the last film, the action takes place in 1983. In this alt-history, mutants — previously society's most dangerous secret — have been out and proud ever since Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence) saved the life of President Nixon in full view of the world's media on the White House lawn. "They're part of society and part of culture," says Singer. "Here, they're almost accepted."

So, at his family mansion in Westchester, New York, the incredibly powerful telepath Charles Xavier (James







Top: Apocalypse (Oscar Isaac), lying down on the job.
Above: Charles Xavier (James McAvoy) utilises Cerebro as Cyclops's bro Alex/Havok (Lucas Till) lurks behind.

McAvoy) is running his School For Gifted Youngsters, along with his trusty companion Hank McCoy/Beast (Nicholas Hoult). Meanwhile, Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence) works to free mutants from slavery and exploitation. As for Erik (Michael Fassbender), despite becoming the world's most wanted man, he's managed to find a life of peace and solitude in Poland.

Into their world comes Apocalypse, fresh from a millennium-long slumber. Everyone's grumpy when they've just woken up, and Apocalypse is no exception. Quickly deciding that modern society is too decadent and corrupt, he ›

EVOLUTIONARY LEAPS

LEGENDARY *THE UNCANNY X-MEN* AUTHOR CHRIS CLAREMONT PICKS HIS FIVE KEY STORY ARCS

WORDS **DORIAN LYNSKEY**



THE DARK PHOENIX SAGA *(THE UNCANNY X-MEN*, #129-138, 1980)

"Anyone can write a story about people hitting people," says Claremont. "But to try to make it meaningful and relevant, that's a gamechanger." After taking over the title, he aimed to "keep everyone guessing". His boldest move was turning Jean Grey into the planet-annihilating Dark Phoenix, before killing her off. "We established for the readers that our heroes were at legitimate risk," he says. Many weren't happy. "Frank Miller and I kept notes because Frank got death threats when he killed off Elektra and I got death threats when I killed off Phoenix."



DAYS OF FUTURE PAST *(THE UNCANNY X-MEN*, #141-142, 1981)

The socially conscious Claremont used mutants as a metaphor for other marginalised groups. "Their struggle is not simply to defeat the bad guys, it's to establish themselves as honourable fellow citizens of the planet," he says. This dystopian narrative imagined a future (2013!) of mutant genocide at the hands of giant robots the Sentinels. "The idea was to show our heroes why their fight is so necessary," says Claremont. How did it feel sentencing beloved characters to harrowing deaths? "Crass as it may sound, it was incredibly cool."



I, MAGNETO... *(THE UNCANNY X-MEN* #150, 1981)

As a student in 1970, Claremont spent two months on an Israeli kibbutz. His conversations with Holocaust survivors informed Magneto's World War II backstory. Claremont considers Magneto's relationship with former friend Charles Xavier and his evolution into "an angry anti-human, pro-mutant terrorist" to be one 150-issue arc, but picks this issue for its flash of self-awareness. "He lashes out and hits Kitty Pryde, a 13-year-old kid. His shattering realisation is: 'What kind of monster have I become? Has what the Nazis did to me made me a Nazi?'"



THE JAPAN SAGA *(WOLVERINE* #1-4, 1982)

Ornery Canadian Wolverine developed rock-star charisma after artist John Byrne replaced Dave Cockrum in 1977. "John bonded with Logan," says Claremont. "They were both Canadian and they both felt like outsiders." But it was Frank Miller who drew Logan's first solo story, a tale of love and honour in Japan, which inspired 2013 movie *The Wolverine*. "It got to the heart and soul of Wolverine," says Claremont. "The conflict between the animal side and the desire to be as purely human and under control as any Japanese samurai."



MUTANT MASSACRE *(THE UNCANNY X-MEN* #210-213 AND OTHERS, 1986)

With Louise and Walter Simonson, Claremont created an unprecedented crossover in which various mutant teams (and Thor) try to save subterranean mutant community the Morlocks from the murderous Marauders. "We wanted to thin down the herd," says Claremont. "One of the things that makes the X-Men so crucial is they're relatively small in number but can have a tremendous impact." Huge sales made such crossovers an annual event, with 1990's *X-Tinction Agenda* featuring a guy named Apocalypse...

declares that the world will need to be remade. And who better to take on the job than God?

"He's someone who's been able to go from age to age collecting and growing his consciousness, and feeling that he is the steward of humanity and evolution," explains Apocalypse himself, aka Oscar Isaac. "That language — 'I am God' — is just a very rudimentary way of explaining, 'I am.' That is the God of the Old Testament."

And Apocalypse has a very particular set of Godlike skills; skills that make him a nightmare for people like the X-Men. Not only can he control technology, teleport, and enhance the abilities of his chosen Horsemen, but "he can move inanimate matter," explains Singer. "He can dissolve, change, and transform inanimate molecules. The end becomes an all-out battle with a force that's very formidable. He's a hard man to break."

By way of illustration, Singer shows *Empire* an incomplete but still startling scene that involves the use of that power on an awesome scale, as entire buildings are slowly reduced to their component parts, the particles flying off to reassemble somewhere, for some dark purpose. "Apocalypse creates a giant



Parts of the movie take place thousands of years ago in Egypt.



Next time Beast (Nicholas Hoult) would remember to check the mirror before pulling out.

global problem," Singer says, "and has to be dealt with on a global level." Evolution has finally given way to escalation.

IF HE was to deliver the end of the world, Singer had to first deliver the deliverer of the end of the world. Tom Hardy was rumoured initially, but the director soon found his man: Oscar Isaac. Here, Singer reasoned, was an actor who could hold his own with heavyweights like Lawrence and Fassbender. Here was a man who could project a sense of steely, megalomaniacal menace while finding the humanity beneath all that blue paint. And, most crucially, here was someone willing to go "Full Skeletor".

"It's an expression we developed on set, coined from the movie *Masters Of The Universe*," laughs Singer, referring to the skeletal villain played by Frank Langella in that 1987 kids' cartoon adaptation starring Dolph Lundgren. (As chance would have it, Singer's good friend, Gary Goddard, who wrote and directed the movie, shows up on set that very day; he's tickled when he finds out.) "I mean that in the most flattering way to Mr. Frank Langella. It's not a joke: he committed. So that's become our ›

TEAM X

KODI SMIT-MCPHEE *is* NIGHTCRAWLER

Talk to your average 19-year-old bloke, and chances are you'll tackle the following topics: sport (possibly football), music, the tweets of Kim Kardashian. Kodi Smit-McPhee is not your average 19-year-old bloke. "I study quantum physics and ancient Egyptian religion and ancient philosophy and Egyptian philosophy," he says, in an almost off-hand manner, before going on to outline the kind of bewilderingly big-brained theories that would have Beast reaching for the smelling salts. Deepak Chopra is name-dropped, as is the Egyptian god of wisdom, Thoth, and the philosopher Hermes Trismegistus. It's clear why Bryan Singer calls him 'The Prophet'.

It's also clear why the young Australian actor, who previously graced the likes of *The Road*, *Slow West* and *Let Me In*, is a perfect fit for this new version of Nightcrawler, the blue-skinned, teleporting mutant who shows up in an *X-Men* movie for the first time since 2003's *X-Men 2*, when he was played so memorably by Alan Cumming. Nightcrawler – or Kurt Wagner, as he's also known – is a sensitive, inquisitive soul. "Kurt's an affectionate, cute character," says Smit-McPhee. "He's almost a cute animal to me. He comes from a different direction to the other X-Men. He has a different backstory, a different look. He's awkward and weird and amazing in a different way."

It takes three hours every day to transform the gangly actor into Nightcrawler, but you won't find him complaining. "I find I'm extremely grateful to be that uncomfortable playing a character," he says. "It's like being enlightened." Today, though, he's got a day off, and he's extremely grateful for that as well. "It's a very nice thing to get out of the shower and not see blue everywhere," he laughs, "like Nightcrawler's had an attack of diarrhoea or something." Ah, so it's not all highfalutin theories; there's a lowbrow side in there, too. Maybe he is a normal teenager, after all.



TEAM X

ALEXANDRA SHIPP *is* STORM

When we first meet Alexandra Shipp's Storm in *X-Men: Apocalypse*, she will not be the cool, collected stateswoman played by Halle Berry across four previous X-movies. Here, she's a young orphan, using her wiles and weather witch abilities to survive on the streets of Cairo. In fact, Ororo Munroe isn't even an X-Man at first – she operates firmly on the other side of the law. So when Apocalypse shows up, offering her a chance to become the first of his Four Horsemen, she's in. "My take on Storm is coming from a completely emotional state," says Shipp, "when you're 18 and just settling into your hormones. When Apocalypse says, 'I am what you are looking for. You will be the goddess you deserve to be,' that clicks for her."

A younger Storm allows the character to return to her roots as a Kenyan goddess (Berry's Storm started off with an accent in *X-Men*, before dropping it for the sequels). "The minute I got this, I started studying Kenyan everything," says Shipp. "I'm trying not to sound Jamaican! They have similar glottal sounds." And then there's the hair. Storm's mohawk, one of the most famous hairdos in comic book history, was first introduced by artist Paul Smith in 1983 – which just happens to be the year in which *Apocalypse* is set. So Shipp had to shave her noggin. "It's been a bit of a shock," she admits of life without her usual curls. "I wasn't sure what was under there. A dent, or three sixes."

Shipp's life changed in the time it took Bryan Singer to tweet an update last January. "I looked at my phone," she says of Singer's post in which he confirmed that she was his new Storm. "I was like, 'What does this mean? Am I Storm?'"

Twenty minutes later she got even-more-official-than-a-tweet-from-the-director-of-the-movie confirmation: she was, indeed, Storm. "I didn't know whether to crap my pants or throw up," she laughs. Which did she choose? "It was simultaneous." Lovely.





vernacular for what levels of intensity these villains can take their performance to. Sometimes you want to go Half Skeletor. Sometimes Three-Quarter Skeletor. Occasionally I allow Oscar to go Full Skeletor."

Singer then shows *Empire* a scene that illustrates his point. It's a seduction scene, in the purest sense of the word, as Apocalypse, seeking to recruit Magneto as the crown jewel of his Horsemen, takes him to the scene of his biggest trauma and whispers sweet nothings into his ears. "He comes to Erik when he's at a very low place, very vengeful," says Fassbender. "He's railing against God, he's demanding answers, and when Apocalypse shows up it's like, 'Have I been answered in some way?'"

It's an enormously powerful moment, with both Fassbender and Isaac raw, intense, committed. In Isaac's case it's particularly impressive, given that he's encumbered — and virtually unrecognisable, sadly, Poe Dameron fans — by heavy prosthetics and a heavier costume. "Had I known [the make-up involved], I would have probably said no," jokes Isaac, who's such a big X-Men fan that he actively sought out the role. "Hopefully it added to the intensity of the character emotionally."



Angel (Ben Hardy) psyches himself up in an East Berlin mutant fight club. **Below left:** Josh Helman's Stryker means business.



From the brief snippets we're privy to, that does seem to be the case. But the Fassbender/Isaac act-off is also a stark reminder that, for all the devastation and destruction that's about to be wrought, this is a franchise that started off all those years ago with a scene set in Auschwitz. The X-Men movies have weightier ambitions than most.

"We have large sequences," says Singer, "and there are some movies where that's the gag. That's never going to be our gag. We have big shit, but our movie is always going to be driven by our characters."

That is evident throughout *Empire*'s three-day stint on the film's Montreal set; all of which are dedicated to a sequence that takes place at Alkali Lake, the Canadian military base which played such a pivotal role for Hugh Jackman's Wolverine in *X-Men 2* and, erm, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*.

There is no Wolverine here. "As a central character, he didn't fit into this particular story," says Singer. But Lawrence (not in Mystique blue), Nicholas Hoult (in full furry mode as Beast), Evan Peters (the super-speedy Quicksilver) and Rose Byrne (CIA analyst Moira MacTaggert) are present and correct. ›

It's a seemingly simple set-up: the quartet have been kidnapped by army twonk William Stryker (Josh Helman) following a cataclysmic event at the X-Mansion, and wake up in a holding cell. On a balcony above them, Stryker taunts his prisoners, demanding to know the whereabouts of Magneto. And that's essentially it.

But over the three days, Singer fiddles and finesses the material, giving everybody something to do. Hoult gets a comedic bit with the locked doors. Byrne gets a big chunk of X-position. Lawrence, unfortunately, gets a crick in her neck from lying on the cold, steel floor, so she has to miss the second day of filming. "I'm turning 25 — all your bones start giving out," she laughs upon her return the next day. "On *The Hunger Games*, I've had to run through trees which were exploding and on fire, but I got injured sleeping on a grated floor? So weird."

Without his leading lady, Singer doesn't miss a beat, shooting around her, cutting a page of dialogue, and taking the opportunity to refine the scene further so that when Lawrence returns, he can spend quality time developing a fairly lengthy exchange with Quicksilver.

By the end, the sequence is almost



Quicksilver (Evan Peters) prepares to spirit Raven (Jennifer Lawrence) away from danger. Beware of whiplash.



The immensely powerful Jean Grey (Sophie Turner) stands outside Cerebro in the X-Mansion.

unrecognisable from those first few takes. It's longer, looser, funnier, and, as with the best moments, focused on character. That's Singer and Kinberg's goal. Even the action in their movie should spring organically from such considerations, including the show-stopping psychic battle between Apocalypse and Xavier, in which the former can grow to gargantuan proportions, while the latter can step out of his wheelchair, ready to dispense roundhouse kicks of X-justice. "I got to beat the shit out of Apocalypse the other day," laughs McAvoy. "Charles gets pretty violent on his ass. And Apocalypse tries to do something to me that's pretty fucking brutal. I think that might leap out at people."

WHEN *EMPIRE* catches up with Singer for the final time in February, he's pretty beaten up himself. He's just finished filming the very last shot in a fortnight of additional shooting and pick-ups in Montreal. He's jetlagged, he's hurt his left shoulder, and he's exhausted but elated. "This movie to me is closure," he says. "It's, in a way, a conclusion to a six-film journey."

That journey, of course, began with *X-Men* back in 2000 (although Singer started work on the movie in 1996), with ›

TEAM X

OLIVIA MUNN *is* PSYLOCKE

Warning: playing a sword-wielding telekinetic warrior can be hazardous to your health. "I've been banged up and put back together," says Olivia Munn, showing off arms stippled with red and black welts from fight training. "And I pulled both hamstrings," she says. "It's a weird thing to be in so much pain and yet be excited by it."

Munn's excitement stems from a place of pure, undiluted joy: the fulfilment of a childhood dream. As far back as she can remember, she's always wanted to be Psylocke. "I come from a family that would talk about *X-Men* as if it were the Civil War," she says. "Every week, we would go get the comic books. It was our childhood. I've loved Psylocke for so long."

Munn's enthusiasm for the character spilled over in her first meeting with Singer, when she effectively schooled the director on his own movie. "It made me feel good to be able to speak for her," she says. "'Oh, you don't know her? Let me tell you about her...' He could have thought it annoying, but he was like, 'I hear you!'" Munn's contributions led to the character's costume changing from a black leather number to the purple-and-red creation virtually torn from the pages of the comic book.

Although Psylocke is one of the Four Horsemen, Munn insists she isn't necessarily evil. "She's looking for a righteous purpose. Her powers can be used for good and bad, and right now it's bad. And it's fun to play bad."

Munn started out as a TV host on US cable channel G4's geek property *Attack Of The Show!* in 2006, and though she's been acting full-time for a while now – most notably in Aaron Sorkin's *The Newsroom* – this is her biggest project to date. "I still get nervous coming on set," she admits. "I feel like it wasn't long ago I was on G4, and I still feel like somebody dropped a wristband. 'I'm going in, guys, I'll tell you what I find!'"



TEAM X

BEN HARDY *is* ARCHANGEL

The leap from UK soap *EastEnders* to winged mutant was, as you'd expect, a formidable one for Ben Hardy. "I was terrified," he says of his first day shooting *X-Men: Apocalypse*. "My girlfriend was over and she'll tell you, the night before I was not good to be around at all. There wasn't much sleep that night, and not in the good sense..." After the cameras had finally rolled on his first scene, the nerves didn't abate much. "I was part of the ensemble and didn't have any dialogue," he recalls. "Which meant I was nervous again the first time I had dialogue!"

As portrayed in the early editions of the *X-Men* series, Angel is a brash, outspoken playboy, the heir to a major corporation: not unlike the character he played on *EastEnders*. Although in this iteration, the character's a more tortured soul, forced to battle other mutants in an underground fight club. Rescued and recruited by Apocalypse, he's transformed into the metal-winged Archangel, the third corner of his Four Horsemen jigsaw. Something Hardy could get his teeth into. "He's been wronged a lot in his life," he explains. "He's angry about that and maybe quite cocky and arrogant, and he gets caught up in Apocalypse's logic."

Hardy also got to experience something that almost never happens on the BBC soapie: flying. "It was great fun," he says of being whizzed around in a harness. "It's not comfortable, though. Particularly for the manhood."

Hardy was an EastEnder for three years, before quitting Albert Square to try his luck in Hollywood – a decision that was vindicated in just one week when he landed the role. "It's still sinking in," he says. "Not to discredit what I've done before, but this was the ultimate goal, to do films like this. I feel blessed. Please don't say blessed, I'm playing Angel. You're going to do it to me, aren't you?" Would we do something like that?





"Did you unplug the iron?" Jean Grey and Nightcrawler (Kodi Smit-McPhee) have a moment.

the casting of his first group of X-Men: James Marsden as Cyclops, Famke Janssen as Jean Grey, Halle Berry as Storm. For *Apocalypse*, he got to fill those roles all over again in the form of Tye Sheridan, Sophie Turner and Alexandra Shipp, while also adding Kodi Smit-McPhee as a young version of *X-Men 2*'s Nightcrawler. "This movie is the story of the true formation of the X-Men. Fundamentally, the story is about how Xavier came to form the X-Men as we would know them in *X-Men 1, 2* and *3*," adds the director.

Singer is closing the loop while introducing plenty of possibilities for the next movie with the formation of an all-new, all-different X-Men. This is the director who had Cyclops sneer at the idea of "yellow spandex" in *X-Men*, but he's embracing the comic book aesthetic more openly than ever before. "I'm doing it gradually," he confirms. "We're not *The Dark Knight*, we're not Marvel [*Studios*], we have our own style, and to let that evolve slowly has been part of the fun for me." It also means that, at last, McAvoy finally gets to go "full baldie" as Xavier, for reasons we couldn't possibly divulge. "I'm glad we did it," he says. "It feels now that I'm playing Professor X, whereas before I







Psychic warrior Psylocke (Olivia Munn) wields her big old sword. Steer clear.

thought I was playing Charles."

The *X-Men* series will power on, of course. But when it starts up again, is there a chance Singer might not be on board? "Closure" is such a definitive word. "Abandoning the franchise is not something I think about," he says. "But I could not roll into another *X-Men* movie tomorrow. And I hope not to. I hope to take a break."

Empire's idea of a break is sitting on a beach, earning 20 per cent. Singer's is to make another huge movie. Later in the year, he starts shooting one of his dream projects, an adaptation of Jules Verne's classic adventure tale, *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*. "I'm in soft prep. Well, I'm in semi-hard prep," he giggles. "It's a very aggressive, very intense science fiction movie that happens to take place in a strange and interesting time period."

Kinberg and his fellow X-producers, Hutch Parker and Lauren Shuler Donner, seem to be keeping the door ajar for Singer to return once he's hung up his wetsuit. Kinberg admits ideas have been kicked around, but no official announcement has been made, while the expanding X-universe, inspired by the phenomenal success of *Deadpool*, will keep them busy for a while. Hugh ›



Singer poses with his Professor X (McAvoy) and the new-look team.

Jackman's final film as Wolverine starts shooting in May, and will be swiftly followed by Channing Tatum and Doug Liman's *Gambit*, a *New Mutants* movie following the adventures of younger recruits, and, naturally, *Deadpool 2*.

But should there be an *X-Men 7*, as nobody will ever call it, casting may also be an issue. Singer is introducing new cast members with one eye on the future, but this prequel trilogy has been built around Fassbender, Hoult, Lawrence, and McAvoy, whose contracts all expire with *Apocalypse*. They could all wave goodbye at this point, but interestingly they appear keen not to. McAvoy talks casually about "the next one", while Lawrence, who can surely write her own ticket, is equally effusive. "I am dying to come back," she says. "I love these movies, I love being in them. I love ensemble movies because it's not on anyone's shoulders."

Who could the X-Men face next? Well, there's Magneto, of course. There's always Magneto. However, there's a sense that his villainous rinse-and-repeat may have played out.

To the comics, then, and ne'er-do-wells like the geneticist Mister Sinister, or Onslaught, a psionic melding of Xavier and Magneto. "I'd love to use Proteus somehow," says Singer of a mutant that can warp reality itself. "There's a lot visually you could do with a character like that."

Or there's even Jean Grey, who is famously consumed by the immense power rumbling around inside her and becomes Dark Phoenix, an entity capable of consuming a star. A version of that storyline played out in *X-Men: The Last Stand*, but both Singer (who passed on directing) and Kinberg, who co-wrote it, have lamented the sloppy execution. They want a second bite of the cherry, and there may even be a hint

here that Phoenix is ready to rise from the ashes. "Jean is a huge part of this movie," says Kinberg. "It's fun to write characters that you know one day will become maybe too powerful for their own good. It's fun to see sparks of that."

Still, no point worrying about apocalypse soon when the focus should be on Apocalypse now, as the oldest franchise in comic book movies goes seriously big. That's evolution *and* escalation.

X-MEN: APOCALYPSE **IS OUT ON MAY 19 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE.**

SUPER-MUTANT!

BLENDING X-MEN BODY PARTS TO CREATE THE ULTIMATE MEGA-FREAK

WORDS **DAN JOLIN** ILLUSTRATION **JOHN ROYLE**



1 STORM The 1983 mohawk-makeover look was easily the weather witch's coolest.

2 CYCLOPS Eyeballs that laser out deadly force-blasts? If looks could kill...

3 TOAD A tongue that stretches up to four metres? If licks could kill...

4 HAVOK Cyclops's big brother can do plasma blasts from his chest, making him the only mutant who can nuke you with his nipples.

5 COLOSSUS The metallic Russian strongman's burnished biceps should be kept well-oiled.

6 WOLVERINE Three razor-sharp, adamantium reasons why you should never fist-bump Logan.

7 BEAST No X-Men-based freakensteins should be without a splash of blue, so here's some navy fur, courtesy of Dr. Hank McCoy.

8 LADY DEATHSTRIKE Super-stabby fingers, as modelled by Kelly Hu in the first *X-Men* sequel.

9 NIGHTCRAWLER A devilish appendage from the BAMF-y Kurt Wagner, and fully prehensile, too.

10 ARCHANGEL Wings once nice and feathery, now turned to deadly sharp metal by Apocalypse.

11 SHADOWCAT A ghostly gam from Kitty Pryde, who can literally walk through walls.

12 EMMA FROST "A kiss on the hand may be quite continental / But diamond is a girl's best unbreakable material to transmute into..."

The MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

Within just two years, the previously unknown Taron Egerton has proved he not only has star power, but also range. The kind of range that makes him perfect casting for... *Eddie The Eagle*?!

AN *Empire* PRODUCTION

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT** PORTRAITS **SARAH DUNN** TYPE **BEATO**











EVERYBODY REMEMBERS THEIR first time. And Taron Egerton is no different. It was October 8, 2013, when he first walked onto the set of Matthew Vaughn's *Kingsman: The Secret Service*. It was memorable for a few reasons. He wasn't just popping his cherry as a leading man on the big-budget spy caper — right there on the call sheet alongside venerable acting types like Michael Caine, Samuel L. Jackson and Colin Firth; this was his first time on a film set doing *anything*. Oh, and Vaughn was also planning to drop him from a 18-metre-high crane.

"It was the final part of the descent from a sky-dive," laughs Egerton. Well, he can laugh about it now. "I don't quite know how I got through that, really. It was a baptism of fire, but Matthew didn't have any doubts."

When Vaughn was looking for someone to play Eggsy, *Kingsman's* teen-hooligan-turned-gentleman-spy, he boiled it down to a straight choice between two young British actors: John Boyega and Egerton. Post-*Attack The Block*, Boyega was a known quantity; Egerton less so. At that point in his career, he had made something of a splash on the London theatre scene in the likes of *No Quarter* at the Royal Court and *The Last Of The Haussmans* at the National Theatre, but film hadn't come his way. Vaughn faced a dilemma. "It was a tough call — Boyega is a fabulous actor, but there's something about Taron," the director says. "You have to listen to your instincts about who that role is. John's probably thinking, 'Thank fuck he didn't cast me!' because he might never have been in *Star Wars*!"

A surprise smash, grossing $414 million worldwide, *Kingsman* may have had its big-name stars, but it's hard to overestimate the importance of Egerton. Looking good in both Savile Row suits and shellsuits that seared your eyes, Egerton held his own alongside his illustrious co-stars.

Vaughn — who previously discovered Charlie Cox, Chloë Grace Moretz and Aaron Taylor-Johnson — had done it again. He'd found a kid who could not only handle the physical demands of action, but also transform himself completely and convincingly. So, when he was looking for someone to play the title role in *Eddie The Eagle*, for which he's producer, he knew just the guy.

1 As Eddie Edwards, with invented mentor Bronson Peary (Hugh Jackman).

2 *Kingsman: The Secret Service*'s Eggsy keeps afloat.

3 Alongside Tom Hardy in *Legend*.

4 With Alicia Vikander in Vera Brittain memoir *Testament Of Youth*.

ON THE SURFACE,

playing the most (in)famous ski jumper in Olympic history might seem an unlikely next move for Egerton. It's a smaller film, for one. And Eddie Edwards, the icon of the 1988 Winter Olympics with his inch-thick specs, wispy 'tache and shock of ginger hair, is as far removed from Eggsy as they come. But that's the point. "I've been offered quite a few rude boys of late," he says, in a Welsh accent forged in that village with the long, unpronounceable name. "And there's a real relish in messing with people's expectations. 'Oh, you think I'm *this*, do you? Well, I'm actually *this*.' Eddie was a great way of doing that. It's a nice opportunity to do something that's very un-Eggsy. Eddie's altogether more delicate. He's a bit more of an innocent."

Dexter Fletcher's film is frothy fun, the sort of unashamed crowdpleaser that should perform well but won't win major awards. Yet it confirms that Egerton is the real deal. Here, the only muscles he exercises are acting ones, bringing real charm to the hapless Edwards. And again he goes toe-to-toe with an experienced star (Hugh Jackman) and emerges with the film tucked under his arm.

Fletcher admits he was initially hesitant to cast Egerton. "I thought Taron was way too good-looking to play Eddie," he says. So producer Matthew Vaughn, supremely confident he had the right man for the job, flew the actor to New York for a screen test with Jackman that finally convinced the director. "He put his jaw ever so slightly forward and had these glasses that magnified his eyes and it was like, 'Wow, there he is.' He's not just a fast-car-driving, martini-drinking, women-bedding hero. He has more range than that."

Egerton says that he didn't take the role purely because of Vaughn, but there's no doubt he thinks fondly of his *Kingsman* director, not least because he changed his life. "I'd very much describe him as a friend," he says. "We speak on the phone about things that are totally unrelated to work. He asks for my opinion on things. For a young actor who can count the films he's done on one hand, it's a real privilege."

EVERYBODY REMEMBERS

their first time. Eight years prior to his film-set debut, Taron Egerton found himself on stage in Aberystwyth, wearing a red dress and matching feather boa — his true introduction to acting.

"I had made a great group of friends, who are still my great group of friends now," he explains. "Some of them were involved in a youth theatre and I tagged along with them."

Tagging along led to a role in their production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Egerton was invited to play Flute, a bellows-mender who cross-dresses in the play within the play. "I remember being so, so nervous and apprehensive about being a ›



• PREVIOUS PAGE: GREY SUIT, SHIRT AND TIE BY HARDY AMIES AT MR PORTER.
• THIS PAGE: NAVY COAT BY CHESTER BARRIE. GREY ROLL NECK BY TOMAS MAIER AT MR PORTER.





Taron Egerton, photographed exclusively for *Empire* in Soho, London, on February 11, 2016.

• THIS PAGE: BLUE SUIT AND BLUE SHIRT BY CHESTER BARRIE. STYLING: GRACE GILFEATHER. GROOMING: NATHALIE ELENI. HAIR: JOE MILLS. LOCATION: JJ LOCATIONS.

slightly overweight, self-conscious 15-year-old putting on this dress and going out in front of a live audience," recalls Egerton. "When it actually happened, and the audience cracked up, it was just the most amazing feeling I've ever had in my life."

An amateur psychologist might say Egerton has been chasing that feeling since. It fuelled his desire to apply to drama school, and that initial flurry of stage work. "To be honest, that's something I really miss. I had dreams of winning Olivier Awards," he admits. Film, he says, is something he thought might come along later.

Now he has over 170,000 followers on Twitter, always a decent measure of star power. A video of Mark Ruffalo's wife doubling back to shake his hand at the BAFTAs (where he lost out on the EE Rising Star award to… John Boyega) went viral. And on the final occasion we speak to him for this piece, he has to negotiate a crowd of autograph hunters who have gathered outside his hotel. "That takes some getting used to," he admits. "We're not talking about the queue for the new Apple product or the new Harry Potter book, but it is very surreal."

It would be easy for anyone in Egerton's position to get carried away and turn into a raging asshat, but he has level heads to call upon for advice ("Hugh handles it really brilliantly," he says of his *Eddie* co-star), and is determined to remain the same affable Welshman he was when he set foot on *Kingsman*'s set on that October day. After all, as they say, you can take the boy out of Llanfairpwllgwyngyll, but you can't take Llanfairpwllgwyngyll out of the boy.

"I don't know that anyone plans for this," he says. "But I'd be very sorry to see it go because I am enjoying it immensely."

NOBODY REMEMBERS THEIR

third time. But Egerton is adamant that will change with *Kingsman* sequel *The Golden Circle*: his third collaboration with Matthew Vaughn. "I've never been given a script before where it was written for me," he says. "That's an amazing feeling. It's exciting to be back." He's currently in training for the movie, which starts shooting in April, and while he won't elaborate on what's in store for Eggsy, he will say, "It's demented. Stomach-sickeningly demented at times."

After that comes the title role in *Robin Hood: Origins*, the latest take on Sherwood Forest's most famous denizen, which Egerton insists "feels like a very new retelling of that story, and very character-led. It's set in Robin Hood-y times, but it will have a contemporary feel to it, a bit rock 'n' roll."

It's been a sharp ascent since *Kingsman*, which was only released just over a year ago. As well as bagging the role of England's merriest outlaw, he's also been linked with several blockbusters. Some of that speculation has been nonsense (like every white actor of a certain age, he's been linked with the Young Han Solo movie), some of it specious (a link with playing Cyclops in *X-Men: Apocalypse*), and some of it spot-on (he screen-tested for *Pirates Of The Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales*). But they all have a common link: he's not interested.

Egerton tells us that Vaughn sees more of Eddie Edwards in him than Eggsy, laughing that he's not sure how to take that, but when he discusses his career game plan, we can see what Vaughn means. He's ambitious, but not in a predictable way. "I want to play real characters, rather than young leads in very plotty things," he says. "I want variety. I'm hesitant about strapping myself to another massive beast, unless I really want to do it. I'm not interested in being Franchise Boy."

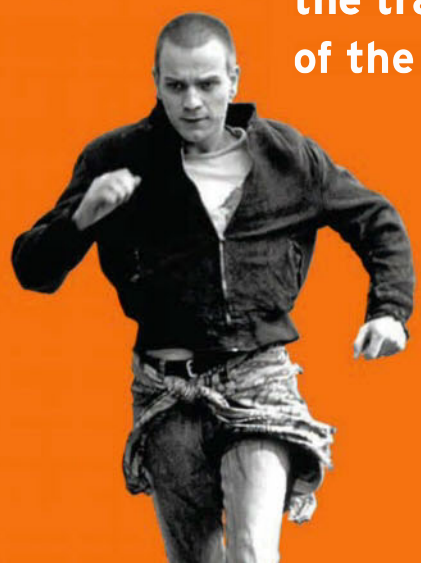
***EDDIE THE EAGLE* IS OUT NOW.**

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Perfect Days

Twenty years since the film's release, *Trainspotting* creator Irvine Welsh relives the transformation of his debut novel into one of the most influential movies of the 1990s





Irvine Welsh on set as drug dealer Mikey Forrester in 1995.





You can't really lose when your novel is adapted for cinema.

If the subsequent film is a success, you can (justifiably) claim that the source material was a major factor in this. Failure, conversely, allows you to distance yourself from the movie, offering the hint that those bad filmmakers fucked it all up. It's unwise to do the latter overtly; film is a collaborative art form and if you've loudmouthed about your misgivings concerning the final offering, the chances are people won't be lining up around the block to work with you on future enterprises.



Left: Danny Boyle, Jonny Lee Miller and Ewan McGregor on location for the "effete wankers" scene.
Below and overleaf: From the archives: production stills and on-set images featuring cast and crew.

Thrusting a novelist — perhaps the ultimate individualist — into a collective artistic endeavour seems a recipe for tension and discord. When such enmity occurs, it often stems from a misunderstanding of the process of adapting a book for screen, usually on the author's part. From my conversations with novelists, too many are curators of their own work rather than genuinely excited at the prospect of creative transformation into a different medium. As an author, it's crucial to immediately divest yourself of the notion that your book is being tampered with or changed in any way. The novel is still there, intact; the existence of a film adaptation won't change a word of it.

You can't repeat that win-win mantra to yourself enough: the real issue is the scale of your success. Obviously, you stand a better chance of winning bigger if the film is exceptional. And any collaboration is more likely to succeed if you get involved positively in assisting it to this end.

In film, paradoxically, one of the ways the author can do that is to simply keep the fuck out of the road. On set, the director has to be the person making the decisions. The author should only be there (or preferably not) under their grace, and operating within the confines of any defined role they've been designated, be it producer, consultant, actor, cheerleader or gofer. I've done all of them on various films. It's good manners to acknowledge that the filmmakers aren't looking over your shoulder as you're typing out the chapters of your novel, so afford them the same respect on set as they shoot their scenes.

Above all, acceptance of the difference of the mediums and acknowledgement of the inherent reciprocity is crucial. I often joke with Jon Baird, who adapted my novel *Filth* for cinema, that his movie is just a commercial for my book, while he describes my novel as the "overstuffed flier" for his film.

MY RECOLLECTIONS AS TO HOW *Trainspotting* came to the screen are a little hazy and unreliable, so please take them with a pinch of salt. What I'm sure about was that after writing the book (then a couple more) I moved to Amsterdam. I was enjoying my retirement from work in my mid-thirties, concentrating on my hobby of writing. Ensconced in a lovely flat overlooking a canal, I was essentially living the writer's dream, doing another book (my fourth) and a stage play.

Meanwhile, trips back to Edinburgh and London confirmed to me that the novel was basically going nuts. Word of mouth was generating excellent sales, while a highly successful stage show, devised by Harry Gibson and produced by Ian Brown for the Traverse Theatre, was touring and earning rave notices. Most importantly, I was besieged with enquiries for the film rights to *Trainspotting*.

I was determined that any movie would have to capture the relentless energy of the novel. First and foremost it needed to be, despite the often-grim subject matter, an uncompromisingly swaggering celebration of youthful camaraderie and *joie de vivre*. The last thing I wanted was a dreary docudrama about heroin, with its stock procession of victims. I didn't see the book as po-faced social realism, flagging up drugs as an issue in a futile attempt to guilt-trip uncaring policy makers, while only really underlining bourgeois smugness. I viewed drugs as neither an intrinsically *good* nor *bad* thing, but endemic to the development of late capitalism; a symptom of an economy transforming into a world without paid work, sustained by a debt-fuelled, fag-end consumerism. ›

Trainspotting is essentially a story about the pains of that economic and social transition. I believe that even if acknowledgment of this sea change is not permitted at cultural level by elites and the media, people still intuitively get it. It's my conviction that this (often-subconscious) resonance accounts, at least in part, for the enduring popularity of the *Trainspotting* phenomenon.

But the correspondence I received from interested filmmakers tended to be *worthy*. Few seemed to get where I was coming from, except one producer, who was also offering (what was then for me) decent money. At this point things started to get messy, and this was largely my fault, as I didn't have an agent. (I had done very well negotiating my own book deals, so arrogantly presumed I could operate the same way in the more complex world of film. In that conceit I'd be proven wrong many times.) This producer mentioned several directors who would be a good fit for this. Top of his list was the acclaimed *Shallow Grave* helmsman Danny Boyle, leading me to make the assumption that he was Danny's regular producer. He wasn't. Confusion reigned when I subsequently received an enthusiastically hand-written note from Danny, mapping out his vision for *Trainspotting*, but also stridently emphasising that he, [*writer*] John Hodge and [*producer*] Andrew Macdonald were an indivisible combination. It was written as if somebody had mooted splitting up this sterling partnership, which was news to me. Yet, even if I was a misplaced recipient of this information, I recall admiring Danny's emphatic defence of the team. He also sent me a screener of *Shallow Grave*, urging me to watch it, which I instantly did.

I loved the movie and saw that its cinematic energy would be the ideal complement to my characters and the ubiquitous, resonant issue of illegal drugs. (With acid house, everybody was popping pills in fields and factories, but if you looked in the media or read current fiction, you'd never know this.) To my mind this combination stood the best chance of producing something memorable. The only problem was that I had already sold the rights. As the credits rolled up on *Shallow Grave*, I thought in grim exasperation: "*Bastard!*"

I quickly got in touch with the producer who now owned the rights, as did Andrew and Danny, both of whom are incredibly persuasive in different ways. One is laconic, offering smooth, cool logic, the other bursting with overt passion and enthusiasm. Thankfully the producer was amenable, generously conceding that the fit between novel and filmmakers was ideal. The rights were transferred to Andrew Macdonald's Figment Films and we were in business.

SO BEGAN THE PROCESS. I WAS SENT regular scripts from John Hodge, which I read in my Amsterdam flat through a stoner haze, my notes usually consisting of "great stuff" or "don't change a word". Having started writing for film myself, I was hugely impressed by the way he'd managed to construct a cinematic narrative around a loose bunch of tales. I decided it was better to be supportive and not fuck with the energy, rather than nitpick on detail. Besides, I didn't believe that there was anything that myself or anybody else could teach John about screenwriting. I still feel the same way today.

One great way to keep a rogue novelist onside is to cast them in the movie. *That* will get them invested in the project. So when shooting began, I took my place as drug dealer Mikey Forrester. I think I asked Danny and John if Forrester could have a shagging scene — preferably a threesome — but they weren't having any of it.





Bizarrely, we were shooting *Trainspotting* in incredible heat. To everybody's astonishment, Glasgow was the hottest place in Europe on the days I did my scenes at our set in the old Wills tobacco factory, in the north of the city. I took it as an optimistic sign: this movie was going to sizzle! I had terrific confidence in the material and the performers that Danny and the casting directors had assembled. Everybody seemed really on it. Ewan McGregor, Bobby Carlyle, Jonny Lee Miller, Ewen Bremner, Kelly Macdonald, Kevin McKidd, Susan Vidler, Peter Mullan, Shirley Henderson… It was a unique group of people, all emergent talents who saw it as a big chance to do something memorable.

There are boundless movie clichés about the "energy on a set" but everybody seemed locked into the collective thought: "This is our fucking moment." Filming can be a long, tiring process with lots of standing around between scenes. As a novice, I was aware of how the actors all handled this differently. Some joked with the crew, while others stayed in role, silently incubating the character within them.

Amidst all those stellar new kids on the block, to me the real *Trainspotting* star was an unsung veteran. Cinematographer Brian Tufano was a legend for his work on *Quadrophenia* alone, and I was delighted that he was shooting the film. I never took my eyes of him. Brian wasn't a young guy, but he would put himself through all sorts of physical contortions to get the shot he wanted, and his dedication and enthusiasm were unbelievable.

BEING INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS OF making this movie was a great apprenticeship for me, worth several years at film school. I learned the essential lesson that once you have all the shots you can enjoy the wrap party and say an emotional goodbye to the cast and crew, but a whole new crucial phase of work goes on in the edit. Music, in particular, was always going to be pivotal, given the way the story had been forged and coloured by my own journey through Iggy Pop, Lou Reed, David Bowie, Joy Division and New Order, and further inspired and fuelled by my then obsession with dance music.

However, it was the addition of the 'third ingredient' of Britpop (which I personally couldn't see working in the context of the film) that proved to be the masterstroke. This posited the movie as the go-to film of 'Cool Britannia', that requiem mass for British youth culture as it was sold off to the global marketplace. This sadly ensured that *Trainspotting* would probably be the last film of its kind: a definitive youth-culture movie of Britain to be set in a relatively contemporary era.

As the edit pressed on, despite moving back to London, I studiously avoided seeing cuts of the movie until Danny, Andrew and John were happy. Then, at a screening in Soho, I brought along some of the book's earliest and biggest acolytes, amongst them my editor Robin Robertson, Primal Scream's Bobby Gillespie and Andrew Innes, music writer Paolo Hewitt and Jeff Barrett of Heavenly Records, all of whom I knew wouldn't hold back if they thought the film wasn't up to the mark. I probably spent as much time watching them as I did the movie. After the screening they were first stunned into uncharacteristic silence, then, when they found their voices, breathless with enthusiasm. I was elated, Andrew Macdonald was relieved: *Trainspotting* worked.

We took the film to Cannes and excitedly lined up on the Promenade de la Croisette in front of the paparazzi. Andrew, the ever-cautious producer, said to me: "If it does as well as *Shallow Grave* I'll be delighted." I think I replied: "Fuck that, it'll be 10 times bigger than that yuppie pish." Yes, I was feeling very bullish.

Leftfield, who appeared on the soundtrack, played a rip-roaring set at the Cap d'Antibes party, which was the 1996 festival's hot ticket. It was at that rumbustious event I first met the scores of people who worked on the movie in absolutely essential roles, all of whom I'd never seen before and who didn't know me from Adam. But I was intrigued and elated rather than annoyed, knowing that a certain type of wanker will shamelessly try to associate with success, and learning that they proliferate in the film business like possibly no other on Earth. To me such people were simply a barometer, their presence confirming that the picture was going to be absolutely huge.

T*RAINSPOTTING* IS NOW A 20-YEAR-OLD movie. Last year I got back together in Edinburgh for a week with John Hodge, Andrew Macdonald and Danny Boyle. There was no real sense of, "Where has all the time gone?" What came across strongly was that everybody has been enjoying themselves thoroughly in their creative life over the last couple of decades, and whatever came out of our Big Brother House reunion, that wasn't about to change.

But there was impetus too; after years of discussions there was the collective sense that we had reached the 'now or never' time for the sequel. Joined by Christian Colson, we worked on the source material of *Porno* and three different versions of the script John had subsequently produced over the years. Generally, it was all about the future, looking forward instead of back, but we weren't forgetting what brought us all to this apartment in the shadow of the castle.

We also got out and about. I introduced everybody to friends who I knew had their fingers on the pulse of all aspects of Edinburgh life, in a way that I, living in the USA, could no longer hope to. We chatted, ate, drank, boxed and walked around. John, the main man at this point of the process, was largely silent, but I could tell he was vibing on all this. Nobody listens as aggressively as he does, actively sucking the salient words out of the air, then asking forensically probing questions.

John was inspired, and he did the business. Thanks to him we're all back together on the as-yet-untitled sequel, now joined by Jonny, Ewan, Ewen and Bobby. We're charged with the pretty straightforward task of emulating one of the biggest, most generation-defining movies of all time. Will we pull it off? Of course we fucking well will!

Admittedly, this is always easy for the author to say. I've done my bit, bringing the characters to life and setting down the rough template with the sequel, *Porno*. The essential premise of the book remains intact: Sick Boy returns from London to get involved in the local vice industry, drawing Renton into one last dodgy collaboration, while all the time setting him up for a 'reunion' with a vengeful Begbie, newly released from prison. However, that's simply the bones of a 12-year-old narrative, radically modernised by a predictably bold and stunning adaptation from John Hodge. I was enthralled by the script's brilliant and original set-pieces, the constant ingenuity and the big surprises. Most impressively, as John was working both from the book and from scripts he'd done over 10 years ago, it feels like an organic evolution from a 20-year-old film, through a 12-year-old book, into the Edinburgh of the present day.

I'm obviously looking forward to the first day of principal photography. And why wouldn't I be? After all, like all authors, I'm at the casino playing with the house's money.

THE SEQUEL TO *TRAINSPOTTING* IS OUT IN 2017.



Pensive moments for Ewan McGregor, Danny Boyle and Peter Mullan.



Ewen Bremner prepares for Spud's catastrophic speed-fuelled job interview.



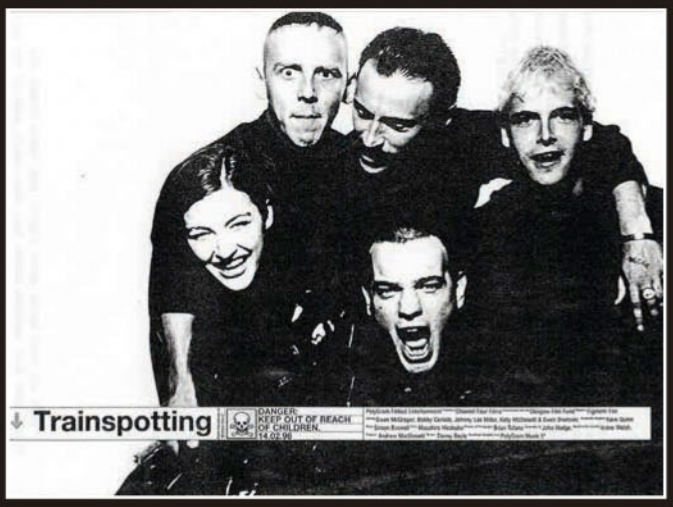
A break from the opening-montage soccer match.

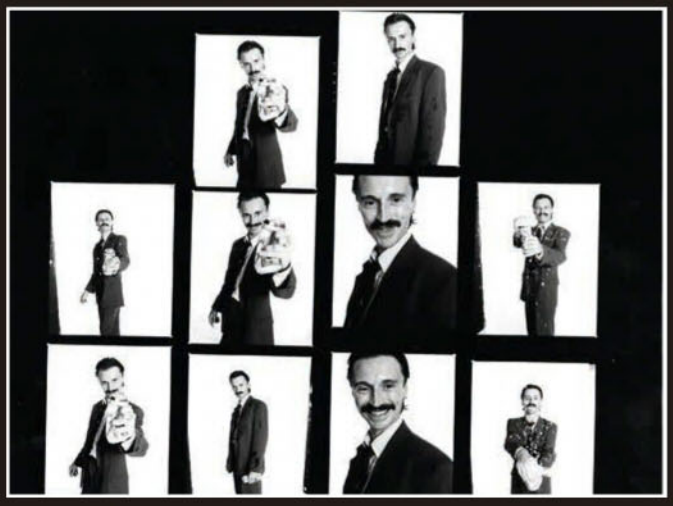














Design For Life

The story behind *that* poster

WORDS **IAN FREER**

IN ANY RETROSPECTIVE OF STUDENT BEDROOM POSTERS – HELLO, Che Guevara, *Betty Blue*, Kurt Cobain – 1996 would belong to *Trainspotting*. A collaboration between design company Stylorouge and photographer Lorenzo Agius, it was stunning wall-candy to announce to any prospective housemate/conquest that you were edgy, cool, and in no way had a damp spot above the bed.

While being "From the makers of *Shallow Grave*", *Trainspotting* was in many ways a hard sell: its subject matter was tough, and it had a mostly unknown cast. It was Stylorouge's Mark Blamire who came up with the elegant solution: striking black-and-white imagery adorned with spare orange type. Influences included the minimalist modernist work of Swiss designer Josef Müller-Brockmann, the signage of British Rail, the orange of toxic warning symbols, '90s club culture, the numbering system used in Irvine Welsh's novel, and the individual character posters created for *Reservoir Dogs*. But most important was the photographic style. Blamire had looked at the Beatles photography of Astrid Kirchherr and the "heroin chic" fashion imagery of Albert Watson, but things turned in a grittier direction once Agius came on board.

"I was a big [*Richard*] Avedon fan," he says. "Avedon brought his book out in the '60s about the Midwest, with these great portraits of homeless people. So I wasn't being unique. I was applying what I thought was great, and it had never been done like that before."

The shoot took place during August 1995 in a studio in Shoreditch on the hottest day of the year. "The studio had no air conditioning, everybody was really irritable," remembers Agius. "It was towards the end of filming. They all looked gaunt and wasted." Proceedings started with a group shot, demanded by film company PolyGram.

"Suddenly the air got prickly," recalls Blamire. "They all got on as actors, but when they were in character and forced together into a huddle they became abrasive and jarred off one another." Agius remembers the actors asking, "'Why are we doing this? We wouldn't be seen like this.' Half the characters didn't like each other."

The mood lightened when it came to the individual shots. Blamire and Agius had ear-marked key moments from the script – Renton (Ewan McGregor) soaking wet after crawling out of the toilet, Sick Boy (Jonny Lee Miller) channelling 007 – and created little vignettes to showcase the compelling characters.

"It was the most memorable time I have ever spent on a photo shoot," says Blamire. "Being in the same room as Robert Carlyle being Begbie was hilarious but intimidating. He did not hold back, smashing open cans of Tennent's, effing and jeffing, dropping C-bombs straight to camera. It felt like it was going to be special."

Sure enough, the *Trainspotting* film poster became an unforgettable icon of 'Cool Britannia' and was soon to be found proudly displayed virtually everywhere. It is now on permanent display in the V&A museum. "I think the 'less is more' approach struck a chord," says Blamire. "Its simplicity made it easy to parody so increased its longevity... Or maybe it's just a bloody amazing bit of poster design for a fantastic film."

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MAY 8

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EDITED by DAVID MICHAEL BROWN

ReView



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Sydney Film Festival double passes, The Division on PS4, DVDs of Sisters, The Big Short, 7 Chinese Brothers, Stretch plus Ip Man 3 on Blu-ray!
p112

REWIND

109

Brian De Palma's favourite non-Hitchcock flick, space slugs, dance routines and Marlon Brando.

TV

108

Sans Coens, the second serving of *Fargo* ups the quirk, the humour and the murder. Aw, heck!

GAMES

110

The final part of the *Uncharted* quadrilogy, *Uncharted 4* is even unchartier than *Uncharted 3*.

MASTERPIECE

111

John Woo's heroic bloodshed masterpiece put the boom into bloody ballistic ballet.

NEW RELEASES

THE FORD AWAKENS

For the six *Empire* readers who haven't seen *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* – there be spoilers ahead. For everyone else: behold our three-page viewing guide...
p098

DVD DVD BR BLU-RAY UV ULTRAVIOLET N NETFLIX PRESTO QUICKFLIX STAN iTUNES GOOGLE PLAY



Star Wars: The Force Awakens

★★★★★

FROM **APRIL 13** / RATED **M** / DIRECTOR **J.J. ABRAMS** / CAST **DAISY RIDLEY, JOHN BOYEGA, ADAM DRIVER, HARRISON FORD**

DVD BR

A NEW HOPE



YOU'VE ALMOST certainly seen it, so let's not spend too long reiterating what is already widely held: that J.J. Abrams has given the world the *Star Wars* sequel it craved. Safe in terms of plot, it does skirt close to being a remake, but instead emerges as warm homage, thick with nods to the original trilogy but with a spirit and humour that make the new characters as lovable as the old.

The Blu-ray set is put together in the same way. It is infectiously geeky, liberally sprinkled with the sort of trivia *Star Wars* fans swarm to like Jawas on an old landspeeder. Mark Hamill read the stage directions out at the cast run-through. Chewbacca's suit, as in the original, is knitted, like a nan's jumper. BB-8 was first drawn by Abrams on a Post-it note.

The main event is an 80-minute documentary, directed by Laurent Bouzereau, the Spielberg of behind-the-scenes docs. It's not a puff piece, as these things often are, but a proper delve into the film. Crucially, it covers the questions you have *after* watching, including proper focus on *that* death. The other video pieces are cute but too brief. Snippets of the read-through make you want to see the rest. Deleted scenes, unfortunately, reveal little new — no sign of that snowspeeder chase or Constable Zuvio — although there's a thrill at Kylo Ren stepping into the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon. As a whole, like the film, the extras show that the rulers of *Star Wars* are doing things for the fans.

EXTRAS Featurettes, documentary, deleted scenes, more.

OLLY RICHARDS

EMPIRE VIEWING GUIDE

EMPIRE SPOILER ALERT!

WORDS **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

OUR TOP PICKS FROM THE MOST ANTICIPATED FILM OF ALL TIME

01.58

Spaced

As the crawl ends, the camera pans across to a Star Destroyer in silhouette, gliding over the surface of Jakku like a shark. It's a traditional way to open the movie – all three original films begin with a Star Destroyer – but J.J. Abrams did explore other options. "There was consideration that we'd open with Luke's lightsaber flying through space," says editor Mary Jo Markey, "landing on Jakku and Maz [*Kanata*]'s hand pulling it out of the ground."



06.40

Meet Kylo

At various stages in development, Kylo Ren sported an elongated Vader mask, a metal hose coming out of his face, and a red oval helmet that ended up being worn by the Guavian Death Gang. "We originally called him 'the Jedi Killer' as a placeholder," says concept artist Doug Chiang. "As we learned more, we started to modify the design. At one point he was more like a pirate bounty hunter."



11.19

Sand Person

Rey lives on Jakku, a sandy junk-planet that resembles Tatooine but isn't. "It's a cold desert," explains Chiang. "We had to make sure it looked distinct, so we settled on the Atacama Desert in South America and Wadi Rum in Jordan, with its amazing mountain ranges." The fallen Star Destroyers were inspired by Indian ship-breaking yards. "We found very powerful images of huge ship hulls on beaches, being manually cut apart."



15.04

Teedo Time

On Jakku we meet two oversized creatures: the seven-metre happabore and the square-helmeted luggabeast, steed of tiny scavenger Teedo. "J.J. and I talked a lot about *War Horse*," says creature designer Neal Scanlan, who oversaw the practical monsters. "There were five puppeteers inside the happabore and two in the luggabeast. The latter was originally going to be seen hauling scrap, but J.J. liked the idea of putting this little tyrant on its back." The actor inside the Teedo suit, Kiran Shah, has played goblins in *Hobbit* and *Harry Potter* films, and was an Ewok in *Return Of The Jedi*.



18.30
The Plutt Thickens

A foul-tempered junkboss with the face of a blobfish, Unkar Plutt (Simon Pegg) originally had a bigger part: scenes of him hunting for the Millennium Falcon at Maz Kanata's castle were cut. "The key word was 'repellent'," says Scanlan. "The idea was to make him large and fleshy and sweaty. He's awful, but he holds the purse strings." As for the instant-bread Plutt hands out in "portions", the four-second shot of it rising was done practically and took three months to get right. Apparently it tasted terrible.



38.33
Thumbs Up

BB-8's cutest moment is the bit where he uses a lighter-gizmo's flame to give Finn (John Boyega) a thumbs-up. "That was an idea our visual-effects editor, Marty [*Allan Kloner*], came up with, and J.J. was very keen to get it in," says editor Maryann Brandon. "We had a jokey mantra: 'When in doubt, cut to BB-8.' We had so much footage of him rolling and looking and turning, it was like our own personal Puppy Channel."



46.01
Wrath Of The Rathtars

"The rathtars were based on a dog's ball with all these spikes on it," says Scanlan of the nightmarish fang-beasts that escape from the cargo hold of Han Solo's new vessel. "It is basically an enormous stomach with one thing on its mind: to put as many things inside that stomach as it can. With *Star Wars*, simplicity is key. Like R2-D2 or BB-8, any child can draw a silhouette of a rathtar." According to the novelisation, Solo was delivering them to King Prana's private zoo, a place we'd like to see visited in a spin-off film.



54.49
It's A Maz, Maz, Maz, Maz World

The Yoda-like Maz Kanata (Lupita Nyong'o) lives on Takodana, a bustling forest planet. The exteriors were shot in the Lake District and Gloucestershire, in the UK. "Originally it was going to be even more exotic," says Chiang, perhaps overstating the exotic nature of rural Britain. "It was going to be a huge city, mixed with a rainforest. Then we found these beautiful locations in England that hadn't been seen before in *Star Wars*."



57.26
Maz's Menagerie

A nod to *A New Hope*'s cantina, Maz's digs are teeming with out-there beasties. Look out for Wollivan (a pig-faced rascal played by Warwick Davis), the Hassk Triplets (werewolf-esque bandits) and the Dengue Sisters (bug-critters huddled around a gambling table). "On set we called them Squitos," says Scanlan of the latter. "They'll invite you to play a game but you'll never win. We would come up with all these ideas and present them to J.J., like an *X Factor* for aliens. We made about 110 creatures: what you see is just a splashing of flavour."

1.05.17

Force-Back

When Rey opens the case holding Luke's lightsaber, the film hurtles into a 'Force-back' sequence. "J.J. kept calling it 'Rey's acid trip'," laughs Brandon. "Just to be clear, we did not drop acid before editing that scene!" The shots were thrashed out during a two-day meeting. "It got philosophical," says Markey. "We talked a lot about how the light side and the dark side are both revealing themselves."



1.10.04

Bomb The Base

"We thought, 'What would a Death Star look like with 30 years of extra tech?'" says Chiang of Starkiller Base, which for a while was called "the Doom Star". "Terraforming has been talked about in the scientific community for a long time, and we decided to magnify that idea." Fun facts: 1) the First Order chose to weaponise this planet because of its minerals, and 2) yes, it can move, since it has rocket ports on its far side.



1.14.07

Castle Siege

As X-wings come swooping in over the water, a beat inspired by Clint Eastwood movie *Firefox*, our heroes battle the First Order on land. "This changed an enormous amount," Markey reveals. "There was a whole encounter with Han and Finn and Maz coming up against stormtroopers. But we didn't want to leave Rey too long. And we didn't want to release a big, bloated movie."

1.15.22

Exit Music (For A Stormtrooper)

That First Order minion who gets blasted by Chewbacca's bowcaster? It's Radiohead's Nigel Godrich, making a sneaky cameo. "There are other stormtroopers to look out for," says Markey. "Daniel Craig, [*composer*] Michael Giacchino, who hauls Poe up to Kylo Ren in the village scene, and American comedian Ben Schwartz. Plus Kevin Smith voiced one in the castle battle." One celebrity who didn't join the ranks of evil: Jon Stewart, who refused to cameo if he couldn't be a good guy.



1.51.01

Lethal Weapon

Kylo Ren's tri-saber is powered by a cracked kyber crystal, much like *Empire*'s photocopier. "I believe the design was thought up in the prop shop in London," says Chiang. "We did some exploration of proto-lightsabers. But they didn't have the same visual power."

2.01.57

Map To The Stars

Where did R2-D2 get his part of the map that leads to Luke? Markey has an out-there answer. "We planted seeds to suggest he might have it in his archive," says the co-editor. "He got it during *Episode IV*, when he plugged into the Death Star."



2.06.12

Luke Who's Not Talking

And the movie ends, with Rey holding out Luke's lightsaber to the Jedi Master himself. "We actually debated a lot about whether it should finish on that helicopter shot, or just the close-up of Luke looking at her and considering whether to reach out," Markey recalls. "But I'm really happy with J.J.'s decision." We'll have to wait until *Episode VIII* to learn more about Luke's mighty new beard.

ALSO OUT



I Am Your Father

★★☆☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **G**

DVD

Was David Prowse (the man inside the Darth Vader suit in *Episodes IV – VI*) wronged when another actor's mug was shown during Vader's unmasking in *Return Of The Jedi*, or was he just an actor doing a job, and them's the breaks? It's a question that only the tinfoil-hat-wearingest of *Star Wars* fans will care about, and this self-serving, fawning, too serious doco about Prowse will likely elicit eye-rolls from those who don't own an original 1977 Greedo action figure. A quest to re-film *Jedi*'s unmasking with Prowse is for nought since the footage can't be shown here for legal reasons, making this an exercise in pointlessness.

EXTRAS None. JAMES JENNINGS

BONUS FEATURE

PROWSE UNMASKED

CO-DIRECTOR TONI BESTARD ON RECREATING *ROTJ*'S UNMASKING

How much work went into recreating Vader's unmasking scene from *Return Of The Jedi*?

Marcos [*Cabotá, co-director*] and I had already made a feature film, and we knew one of the best make-up artists in Spain, and he was very enthusiastic to be able to do the make-up for Darth Vader. We made the shuttle ramp, got the best Vader costume in Spain from the 501st Legion, and shot the sequence.

How did Dave react to seeing the footage?

We had legal advisors on the film, but for us at the end of the day it was really important to recreate this sequence for Dave and to have him in a theatre watching, because it was a tribute. I was sitting close to Dave in the theatre when we screened it, and he had tears in his eyes. It was a great moment, he was very happy. JJ





The gondolier panicked when he realised Venice was nowhere in sight.

In The Heart Of The Sea

★★☆☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M** / DIRECTOR **RON HOWARD** / CAST **CHRIS HEMSWORTH, CILLIAN MURPHY, BRENDAN GLEESON, BENJAMIN WALKER, BEN WHISHAW**

DVD BR UV

A WHALE OF A TIME



IF YOU ARE TELLING THE story that inspired *Moby-Dick*, what can possibly go wrong? Framed by the mechanism of having Brendan Gleeson's old salt recount the fate of the *Essex* to Herman Melville (Ben Whishaw), author-to-be of the Great American Novel, this promises a sea-faring epic told with all the doodads of modern cinema. So why so dramatically soggy? So overstretched? Who sidelines a 100-foot psychopathic sperm whale in search of truth?

With the non-fiction book by Nathaniel Philbrick (a name destined to write about 1820s whaling) providing verisimilitude, screenwriter Charles Leavitt musters a flotilla of yarns. Here is a clash of egos between veteran first mate Owen Chase (Chris Hemsworth, with an accent of no fixed bearing) and greenhorn Captain Pollard (Benjamin Walker, wasted as a posh nut) in gales of manly sea-spray (theme: class). Here the fretting over fished-out waters (theme: capitalism). Here the rash expedition to the mid-Pacific, patrolled by an oversized proto-Moby (theme: man versus nature). And finally, here are 90-odd days in an open boat while your waning fellows look increasingly tasty (theme: man as animal).

Great attention is paid to the authentic hum of history. Poor cabin boy Thomas Nickerson (Tom Holland) — we could call him Ishmael — is tasked with fetching oil from the inside of a rank whale skull. Cinematographer Anthony Dod Mantle gets into the grain of the antique backdrop, setting the ship against Turner-esque skies. And in 3D, the confrontations between man and lifelike CG mega-beast, to lusty bellows of whaler jargon, gain a measure of spectacle.

But determined to encompass every facet of the *Essex*'s woes (history and Melville focused on different aspects of the tale), Ron Howard's film is both overstuffed and undernourished. There's no gathering of suspense. Nothing feels hard won. It's all in too much of a hurry. Before facing the terrible menu choices once adrift, a film should take pause. If you're going to consume human flesh, you've got to chew it over first.

EXTRAS Featurettes, deleted scenes, interviews, Ron Howard's Captain log, more.

IAN NATHAN

ALSO OUT



Mojave

★☆☆☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+** DVD BR

Mojave may have a decent cast, but they're lumbered with a largely nonsensical plot in which a filmmaker suffering a crisis of confidence (Garrett Hedlund) meets a dangerous drifter (Oscar Isaac) while on a desert walkabout. Is he the devil? Or perhaps a Tyler Durden-esque alter ego? With all the existential noodling and pretentious dialogue assaulting you, you'll struggle to care. William Monahan won an Oscar for writing *The Departed*, but after this and 2010's misjudged gangland caper *London Boulevard*, perhaps he should refocus on his screenplays and leave the directing duties to somebody else.
EXTRAS None. DH



Snoopy And Charlie Brown: The Peanuts Movie

★★★☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **G** DVD BR UV

Charles M. Schulz's '50s funny page favourite becomes a charming but slight big screen adventure for Charlie Brown, Snoopy and the gang. Superb digital 2D animation captures the comic's innocent, hand-drawn quality. Snoopy takes on his traditional nemesis with the wartime airplane, Red Baron, while Charlie strikes up the courage to talk to the new girl in town. Bravery, integrity and kindness are important messages, though Schulz's subversive, wacky humour – bouncy and chuckle-worthy – should delight little sprogs and bring a nostalgic smile to the big kids.
EXTRAS Featurettes. JOHN CATANIA



Protestors raged when it turned out Professor X had been faking the whole paraplegic thing.

Our Brand Is Crisis

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M** / DIRECTOR **DAVID GORDON GREEN** / CAST **SANDRA BULLOCK, BILLY BOB THORNTON, ANTHONY MACKIE, SCOOT MCNAIRY, ZOE KAZAN**

DVD BR

A BRAND YOU CAN TRUST



IT'S RARE ENOUGH THAT A political documentary (Rachel Boynton's 2005 film of the same name) inspires a biting fictional satire, but it's more remarkable that it should become a vehicle for an A-list star whose usual taste in comedy is more broad. The setting is Bolivia 2002, where a right-wing politician has hired legendary US spin doctor 'Calamity' Jane Bodine (Sandra Bullock) to come out of retirement and mastermind his election campaign. Her nemesis is the equally formidable Pat Candy (Billy Bob Thornton), reigniting an old feud that puts score-settling before politics. Sparks fly, but the grim cynicism of modern politics adds subversive weight to the film's screwball comedy stylings (a mix that ensured the film didn't visit Australian cinemas, which is a shame) and has a lot to say about modern politics, in the US as well as abroad.
EXTRAS The rather naff sounding *Sandra Bullock: A Role Like No Other*.
DAMON WISE

BONUS FEATURE

GOOD GRIEF!

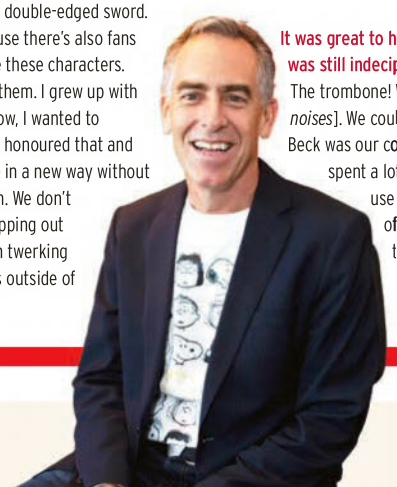
DIRECTOR STEVE MARTINO ON GIVING *PEANUTS* A NEW DIMENSION

What was it like working with the Schulz estate?
Well it was fantastic. I feel like I now have new friends in Craig and Bryan Schulz. In particular, Craig. He's taking on the responsibility for the entire family to keep his father's legacy alive for a new generation. I'm very respectful of what he has taken on. He knows his father's work intimately and I've made movies for a family audience and have an understanding of what a new generation would be looking for. I think it's that collaboration that worked really well.

Was it hard selling Charlie Brown to a modern audience used to Marvel and Pixar?
Well this is that balance. It's a double-edged sword. You're walking that line because there's also fans all around the world who love these characters. And I consider myself one of them. I grew up with these characters, and you know, I wanted to deliver a film experience that honoured that and brought the characters to life in a new way without fundamentally changing them. We don't wanna see Charlie Brown whipping out his iPhone and all of a sudden twerking or doing something that feels outside of the *Peanuts* world. [*Laughs*]

You've avoided stunt casting when it comes to the voices in the film...
Right. I tell ya, this was the thing that was so much fun for me. This movie was different in many respects, and you know, the actors are all kids. We actually recorded with old ribbon mics, the kind of microphones from the mid-'60s because we wanted to try to capture that sound quality. But most importantly, we wanted kids who were just kids. I wanted to be able to work with them and allow them to be natural. They were so fun in the respect that, when we start working on an animated film, we record the voices first. And so I ask them to step into a room, four walls and a microphone, and to use their imaginations.

It was great to hear that Charlie Brown's teacher was still indecipherable...
The trombone! Wah Wah! [*makes trombone noises*]. We couldn't not do it. [*Laughs*] Christophe Beck was our composer on the movie, and we spent a lot of time discussing this early. The use of music to support the emotion of the storytelling was so important to the old *Peanuts* cartoons. We had to do it!
DAVID MICHAEL BROWN





"One... two... three... Paper beats rock! I win!"

Creed

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M** / DIRECTOR **RYAN COOGLER** / CAST **MICHAEL B. JORDAN, SYLVESTER STALLONE, TESSA THOMPSON, PHYLICIA RASHAD**

DVD BR UV

RESTING BULL



THE BEST PUNCHES ARE THE ones you don't see coming. Following the failure of the underrated *Rocky Balboa*, the Rocky series was on the canvas, the count nearing 10. *Creed* not only gets it — and Sly Stallone — back on its feet, but completely reinvigorates it.

The smelling salts have been delivered by Ryan Coogler and Michael B. Jordan, the directing/acting duo who made their mark with the excellent *Fruitvale Station*. That their second act should be to revamp a franchise that started before they were even born is surprising, but welcome. And if, at times, *Creed* follows the tracks of the first *Rocky* a little too reverently, it's no mere retread. There's a different energy at play here.

Much of that stems from Coogler's direction, flashy when it needs to be (along with cinematographer Maryse Alberti, he shoots one fight sequence in a single unbroken take), and impressively controlled, conjuring up a sense of time and place that feels as authentic and informed by Coogler's experiences as *Rocky* was by Stallone's. Race is addressed, of course, but it's never the film's overriding preoccupation: instead, the focus is on the problems that come living with a legacy, and trying to escape from a shadow that seems endless.

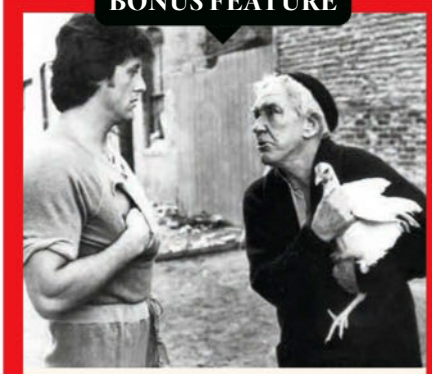
As the son of Apollo Creed, the effortlessly charismatic Jordan nails his father's flamboyance, but also gives Donny a brittleness beneath the braggadocio. He's a young man caught between the desire to turn away from that surname, and the need to know a father who died before he was born. That's why he reaches out to Apollo's old friend, Rocky Balboa, for guidance. There's a reason why this film isn't called *Rocky VII*, but fans of the Italian Stallion won't feel shortchanged by Balboa's second-banana role. From the moment Stallone shuffles on screen, weighed down by the baggage of six movies past including the loss of everyone he ever loved, he discovers notes he has never played as an actor.

It's a generous turn as both actor and character, a literally supporting role. Rocky gathers a team to surround his new fighter and takes more delight in Donny's achievements than he ever did in his own. As he's slowly revitalised by Donny's presence, Stallone recaptures Rocky's nobility and sense of decency, allied to a raw pain that will prick tears from your eyes. A career of action dreck has often obscured the fact that Stallone can act, and here he gives perhaps his best performance. And that's a punch nobody could have seen coming.

EXTRAS Featurettes, deleted scenes.

CHRIS HEWITT

BONUS FEATURE



CREED: THE DEEP CUTS

THE FILM IS STUDDED WITH REFERENCES TO PAST *ROCKY* FILMS. HERE ARE SOME OF THE LESS OBVIOUS ONES...

The Third Fight

At the end of *Rocky III*, Apollo and Rocky have one last bout, but the film ends with the first punch. In *Creed*, Rocky finally reveals who won. It's...

Rocky's Turtles

In the first movie, we meet Cuff and Link, the turtles that *Rocky* bought from Adrian in lieu of having the courage to say anything meaningful to her. In one brief shot, Coogler lets us know that one of them, at least, is still alive and flipping.

The Chicken

In *Rocky II*, Burgess Meredith's Mickey whips Rocky into shape by making him run around after chickens. Rocky does the same to Donny.

Son Of Duke

The Wire's Wood Harris shows up briefly as the trainer of one of Donny's opponents. The point's never laboured, but he's playing the son of Tony Burton's Duke, who was Apollo's – and then Rocky's – right-hand man through the previous movies. Harris's character is called Tony 'Little Duke' Burton.

Return Of Mickey

As Rocky assumes the role of trainer to Donny, so too does he adopt some of the mannerisms favoured by Mickey back in the day. Watch the way he adjusts his hat whenever he gets nervous.

Eulogy For Apollo

At one point we're told that Rocky hasn't spoken to Mary Anne, Apollo's widow (played again by Phylicia Rashad), in years. The last time they spoke? Apollo's funeral in *Rocky IV*.

ALSO OUT



99 Homes

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M**

DVD BR

Michael Shannon reveals the latest of his line in magnificent bastards – corrupt real-estate broker Rick Carver, a merciless entrepreneur feeding off foreclosed Florida properties. Andrew Garfield is his match as the recently evicted builder Carver takes under his slippery wing in Ramin Bahrani's raging, righteous and thrilling take on the financial crisis fall-out.
EXTRAS Cast and crew interviews. ES



The Lobster

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+**

DVD BR UV

In a world where it's a crime to be single, David (Colin Farrell) must find a mate in 45 days or be turned into an animal. Farrell is the heart of this funny, pitch-black, absurdist fairytale, but it's director Yorgos Lanthimos who deserves most credit. Although, however much horror he piles on, his nightmare scenario still seems less painful than Tinder.
EXTRAS Behind-the-scenes. HOH



Suffragette

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M**

DVD BR

Propelled by righteous indignation and soaring to a heart-stopping climax, *Suffragette* tells a no-frills story of the fight for women's right to vote. Sticking it to the man in rousing if not spectacular style, Sarah Gavron's film features an outstanding Carey Mulligan as a laundress squeezed through the emotional wringer.
EXTRAS None. ES



Goodnight Mommy

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M** / DIRECTORS **SEVERIN FIALA, VERONIKA FRANZ** / CAST **LUKAS SCHWARZ, ELIAS SCHWARZ, SUSANNE WUEST**

DVD

MUM'S THE WORD



LONG BEFORE THE RECENT resurgence of arthouse-crossover horror films — from *The Babadook* to *It Follows* and, more recently, *The Witch* — Austrian cinema has been staking out those very borders. A genre pioneered by Oscar winner Michael Haneke, whose 1997 home invasion thriller *Funny Games* casts a long shadow here, this cinema of unease plays around with the mechanics of horror in a way that both fulfils and subverts the audience's expectations. In the case of *Goodnight Mommy* — originally titled much more appropriately *Ich Seh, Ich Seh* (*I See, I See*) — this results in a tightly wound mystery that constantly toys with our sympathies: should we be rooting for two frightened boys or more concerned for their mother?

A key element in *Goodnight Mommy* is its production design, also a very important aspect of producer Ulrich Seidl's queasy urban dramas (notably his *Paradise* trilogy, which dealt in a black comic way with themes of sex, love and religion). Although it is in many respects an old dark house movie, *Goodnight Mommy* takes place in a very modern, sterile space. When Mother (Susanne Wuest) — her name is never mentioned — returns there are after cosmetic surgery, the setting seems to confirm the twins' (Elias and Lukas Schwarz) paranoia. Even if she really is their mother, there may well be an absence there in just another vain, spoilt, nouveau riche trophy wife: the lights are on, but no one's home.

Importantly, as with *The Babadook*, a female presence behind the camera helps take things in an interesting direction, fully engaging with the film's ideas about motherhood and, by extension, age-old concepts of unconditional love. In a way, what directors



Joy

★★☆☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M** / DIRECTOR **DAVID O. RUSSELL** / CAST **JENNIFER LAWRENCE, ROBERT DE NIRO**

DVD BR

THE JOY-HAS-NO-LUCK CLUB



REMEMBER THAT GREG Kinnear movie about the guy who invented windscreen wipers? No? No-one else does, either, because it's hard to get excited about something so mundane. These sort of underdog tales work best when the stakes are high — exhibit one, *Erin Brockovich* — and are less compelling when it's about windscreen wipers, or in this case, mops: woman invents



Darkman 2: Mrs. Darkman.

Veronika Franz (Seidl's wife) and Severin Fiala (Franz's male co-director and former babysitter) have created is an existential and often nasty variation on the chicken-or-the-egg scenario: what we're looking at is very much a *Bad Seed* movie — but where does that evil originate, in the mind or in the womb?

If this all sounds terribly cerebral, things switch in the last act, with a violent climax befitting a traditional horror with its shocking use of household items. But though such scenes are indelible, what stays in the mind is the aftershock. Where others would simply concern itself with the mystery — who's really crazy here, and why? — directors Franz and Fiala are more interested in the human psychology, reflected in a creepily serene coda.

It's weird, it's subtle, it's effective. And if Hollywood ever gets its hands on the remake rights, it will be the first thing to go.

EXTRAS None. **DAMON WISE**

BONUS FEATURE

MOMMY DEAREST

SUSANNE WUEST TALKS UNCONVENTIONAL HORROR MOVIE *GOODNIGHT MOMMY*



What was your relationship like with the twins?
Oh, they're very sweet. Severin and Veronika didn't want me to get too close to them, so they tried to keep us apart, in a way. Which is actually true to the story. But they're very cute, very sweet little boys. There were some really hardcore table tennis matches during breaks.

You spend at least the first half of this film behind a mask. How challenging was that?
I realised very early on that this was going to be really tough. You have a hot bandage wrapped around your head, you can't see properly, you can't smell, everything is swollen, your sense of balance gets lost. It's painful. There was a lot of prosthetics under the bandages, too.

The scene where a cockroach enters your mouth – was that shot for real?
Yes! Matilda the cockroach! She has a credit at the end. Before we started filming, they asked me: "Are you afraid of bugs?" I said, "No." They said, "Would you mind having one of them in your mouth?" I said, "No, but I really want to get to know the 'roach beforehand." So months prior to filming I asked them if I could raise three of them. They were super cute. Seriously. We trained them a lot. They have a great sense memory. **JN**

mop, stakes her mortgage on it, but will the world love her mop? And Russell never really elevates Joy's dilemma beyond "But I need the money" — although he does deliver the funkiest montage about assembling mops in film history.

Jennifer Lawrence is terrific as always. But perhaps Russell has fallen a little too in love with his now-regular leading lady: Lawrence's Joy is essentially flawless (in turns selfless and caring, and then ballsy and dynamic) which makes her strangely boring — she has no growth, nothing to learn except "let Joy be Joy". Likewise, most of Joy's family — especially the sister and a demonic Isabella Rosselini — have all the subtlety and range of Cruella deVil.

Is it a homage to soap operas? Is it a parody of them? They're woven throughout the movie, from TV sets to dream sequences, and Russell seems to delight in aping their improbable plot-lines and hamminess; but then he himself delivers scenes as heavy-handed as neutron-star oven mitts. His own emotional high points rely on lines like "I know I'm going live to see you grow to be the successful matriarch you were born to be" — it'd be nice to say you can't make this stuff up, but sadly, Russell did.

Bradley Cooper deadpanning "I ran America's largest, most affordable, successful, value-driven retailer, a chain called Kmart" and Joy's spiel about the mop itself sound like the "I will not bow to any sponsor" scene in *Wayne's World* — "Nuprin! Little! Yellow! Different!" — but without the humour or self-awareness.

It's not without its charms: like *American Hustle*, it's a beautifully shot time machine, and there's some cute moments when Joy first goes on TV; but it ends up as less than the sum of its parts. Insert your own mess-mopping joke here.

EXTRAS Featurettes.

TIM KEEN

ALSO OUT



Mississippi Grind

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M**

DVD BR

It's an inspired meet-cute when Gerry (Ben Mendelsohn), a soft-eyed realtor with money issues, encounters charismatic chancer Curtis (Ryan Reynolds) at a poker table. Winning big, Gerry asks his new lucky charm to help play his way down the Mississippi to a big New Orleans buy-in game; but the further they get, the more we see what they've already lost. Minus the gloss of *21* and *Ocean's Eleven*, directors Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden (*Sugar*, *Half Nelson*) make the stakes feel higher, more brutal. And while it's a bit of a slow burner, Mendelsohn is so compelling, there's really no need for things to speed up.

EXTRAS Making-of, interviews. **KATE POOLE**



Glassland

★★★☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M**

DVD BR

This elegantly told, slow-burn story of a young cab driver, John (Jack Reynor), who finds himself responsible for his alcoholic mother Jean (Toni Collette), starts out strong but an excessively vague third act falls flat and fails all that has proceeded. Reynor's emotive facial expressions and Collette's terrifying booze-induced rage are equally impressive, injecting John and Jean's dismal Dublin home with profound raw emotion. Unfortunately, writer-director Gerard Barrett's economic storytelling gets too frugal – heavy-handed editing confuses too much of the plot and sours this stylistically pleasing indie drama.

EXTRAS None. **JOHANNA GRUBER**



Ip Man 3

★★★☆☆

FROM **MAY 4** / RATED **M** / DIRECTOR **WILSON YIP** / CAST **DONNIE YEN, LYNN HUNG, JIN ZHANG, MIKE TYSON, PATRICK TAM**

DVD BR

WAITING FOR THE (IP) MAN



THE FINAL PART OF WILSON Yip's *Ip Man* trilogy is a beautifully shot send off for the master of the Wing Chun Fist. The series may have had its thunder stolen by Wong Kar-Wai's majestic *The Grandmaster*, but *Ip Man 3* is still an action-packed bone-cruncher of a good time full of astonishing set pieces, breathtaking martial arts skills and an ear-biting boxer looking for a career change.

Whereas the first film focused on Ip's experiences in the Sino-Japanese War and the second his life in British colonial Hong Kong, the third seems to take a far more fanciful view of his life, building on the Ip Man legend rather than focusing on historical fact. To this end, the gangster taking over the city forcing the peaceful sensei to kick ass and save his community is classic martial arts plotting. Allegedly biographical, and including Ip's first encounter with his most famous pupil Bruce Lee (played by Danny Chan after failed attempts to recreate Lee using CGI), it's doubtful that much of this film actually happened.

Soon to be seen in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, star Donnie Yen is again amazing as the titular hero bringing poise and restraint to the complex role. While fatherhood has mellowed Ip, Yen still manages to show off some astonishingly fluid moves, mainly thanks to Yuen Woo-ping's exhilarating choreography. Zhang Jin also excels as an exiled fighter determined to take Ip's wing chun crown.

However, Mike Tyson as Frank, the scenery chewing villain who wants to close down the school where the young Ip offspring attend, is lacklustre. He certainly has an imposing presence and his much vaunted three-minute rumble with Ip recalls Bruce Lee's confrontation with Bolo Yeung in *Enter The Dragon*, but hulking mass and brute strength do not a great performance make. Speaking Mandarin — and English — phonetically at best, his stilted delivery — and stunt casting — almost derail the whole movie. **EXTRAS** The single *Ip Man 3* disc includes interviews, behind-the-scenes footage, a selection of trailers and a making-of. Pick up the limited edition *Ip Man Trilogy* collection on Blu-ray or DVD and an extra disc worth of bonus features will be yours.

DAVID MICHAEL BROWN

ALSO OUT



Ip Man

★★★☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M**

DVD BR

Ip Man was a celebrated Chinese wushu master who suffered under Japanese occupation during the late '30s and early '40s and then went on to teach his favoured discipline, the brilliantly economical wing chun, to no less an illustrious student than Bruce Lee. In part, Wilson Yip's movie is a shameless hagiography that only bears a passing resemblance to history. But, with the action choreographed by Jackie Chan's chum Sammo Hung, it's also a highly inventive fight film. *Hero*'s Donnie Yen, as Ip Man, somehow turning wing chun's tight, sharp moves (think Bourne) into flourishes. Highlight? When Ip defeats a sword-wielding braggart with a feather duster, thereby redefining 'dust-up'. **EXTRAS** Deleted scenes, making-of, more.

DAN JOLIN



Ip Man 2

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M**

DVD BR

Donnie Yen returns for a second bout of vigorous, crunchy combat in a thoroughly enjoyable beatquel. Set just before the Bruce Lee-mentoring years, Ip Man's now moved to British-ruled Hong Kong, where bent cops and the local martial-arts mafia sabotage his fledgling wing chun school. Midway there's an astonishing series of winner-stays-on boss battles on a rickety table top, before the film thrusts into a wing chun vs. boxing showdown (a flagrant cultural face-off between Chinese decency and Western colonial brashness). Hammy Brit baddies, but what the hell – Yen's one of the great wonders of the action world. **EXTRAS** Making-of, trailers.

SIMON COOK



The Assassin

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **PG** / DIRECTOR **HOU HSIAO-HSIEN** / CAST **QI SHU, CHEN CHANG, SATOSHI TSUMABUKI, YUN ZHOU, DAHONG NI**

DVD BR

NEVER SAY NIE



TAIWANESE DIRECTOR HOU Hsiao-Hsien (*The Puppetmaster*, *Dust In The Wind*) ventures into the wuxia genre of period martial-arts movie — which, in Australian terms, is a little like Rolf de Heer making a sci-fi. *The Assassin*, adapted from a ninth-century text about a legendary female martial artist, is beguiling yet baffling. It's steadily paced, with more long-held contemplative shots of natural beauty than bursts of impressive action, and an elastic, dream-like sense of passing time. It's mostly in old-fashioned Academy ratio, though the frame opens out for a few significant shots. Hou often stages and photographs key scenes in unusual, elliptical manners which are striking — a mass sword-battle in a copse observed from outside the woods — but also frankly make it tricky to follow the story.

The heart of the film is Nie Yinniang (Qi Shu), a black-clad princess raised by her aunt, a rebel nun, to become an unbeatable martial-arts master. In several sequences she dodges and twists when attacked by swordsmen, without even using her claw-like dagger, and bests apparently more ferocious and better-armed men. Her current target is her cousin, Tian Ji'an (Chang Chen), who was once promised to her in marriage but has taken another wife to secure an alliance between his province and the capital. For reasons that remain intriguingly unclear, Nie Yinniang takes a roundabout route to vengeance, prompting the involvement of a weird-looking master magician (who adds a touch of fantasy to the historical drama by sending a smoke ghost to kill Tian Ji'an) and a masked swordswoman (Yun Zhou) who is her mirror-image doppelgänger (and who actually is Tian Ji'an's wife).

Qi Shu is a ferocious presence, calm yet lethal, but Hou doesn't fetishise her deadliness. The underlying message of the film might be that sometimes it is crueller or more dangerous not to kill a miscreant. It might also be the case that the film is more taken by emotions, beauty and passing fancies than plot and character.

EXTRAS None. KIM NEWMAN

ALSO OUT



Road Games

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+** DVD

Not to be mistaken for Richard Franklin's Ozploitation classic of the same name, Abner Pastoll's sun-bleached thriller mixes cultural displacement unease with Hitchcockian twists as Brit Jack (Andrew Simpson) and Véronique (Joséphine de La Baume) find themselves hitching across rural France while a killer is on the loose. Pastoll delights in crashing audience expectations, especially when the hot-to-trot hitchhikers meet a delightfully odd married couple (Frédéric Pierrot and Barbara Crampton) and a crackpot with a penchant for road kill. Weirdness ensues.

EXTRAS None. DAVID MICHAEL BROWN

BONUS FEATURE

SCREAM QUEEN

BARBARA CRAMPTON TALKS THE LANGUAGE OF HORROR

After *You're Next* and *We Are Still Here* resurrected your horror career, what made you pick *Road Games* as your next project?

It was really well crafted and I thought the characters were very interesting. It was more of a thriller, you know, than pure horror movie. And when I was reading it, I didn't know who the killer was until the very end of the movie, and I thought that was really exciting. And I think it's pretty hard to pull off, but I think he did a great job with it.

Was it tough shooting the French dialogue?

It was a little challenging because I don't speak French. I had to hire somebody to help me learn the dialogue. I thought it was a great device that the character of Jack didn't know what was going on at certain instances when we were speaking French. Even when he's one-on-one and thinks he does. I don't think a lot of people use that device very often, so I thought it was a nice touch. DMB




"You can call me Mrs. Zohan."

Fargo: Year Two

★★★★★

FROM **NOW** / CREATOR **NOAH HAWLEY** / CAST **PATRICK WILSON, KIRSTEN DUNST, JESSE PLEMONS, TED DANSON, NICK OFFERMAN, BRAD GARRETT**

DVD BR

HAIL, HAWLEY!



THERE IS MUCH FILM-NERD joy to be squeezed out of Easter egg-hunting in Noah Hawley's second "10-hour movie", which broadens his treat-planting remit even further beyond the borders of Coen-Minnesota than the first. Season 2's soundtrack includes covers of *Man Of Constant Sorrow* (*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*) and Kenny Rogers's *Just Dropped In* (*The Big Lebowski*), while there are strong visual and thematic echoes of *No Country For Old Men* throughout, and of *Miller's Crossing* in Episode 7 especially, where the Gabriel Byrne/John Turturro "look in your heart" scene is virtually restaged.

But Hawley is as concerned with building his own world as he is riffing on the Coens'. There are as many callbacks to S1 as there are to the movies, as he shifts periods from 2006 to 1979 and revisits minor characters, chief among them Keith Carradine's reflective ex-cop Lou Solverson, in their more youthful incarnations (in Lou's case Patrick Wilson, here maximising his considerable focus and charm).

So we witness what exactly happened during the "rodeo" that was the Sioux Falls Massacre, an event referred to a few times during the last season. It begins with a multiple homicide in a Waffle Hut, which, via a UFO-influenced hit-and-run involving an unhinged hairdresser (Kirsten Dunst, the season MVP), sparks a full-on gang war in which an old-school crime clan, the monstrous, squabblesome Gerhardts, take on the more business-ruthless Kansas City Mafia, as personified by Bokeem Woodbine's loquacious fixer, Mike Milligan.

The threads are pulled much tighter here than the somewhat looser-fit S1. Hawley's found his pace now, and maintains a heart-pounding momentum throughout, moving the plot along briskly and steadily as it ploughs through the characters' lives, leaving an ever-increasing pile of carnage in its wake. And, speaking of those poor Midwestern souls, there is a case to be made that Hawley is even better at exploring character than Joel and Ethan. Perhaps it's just the added benefit of the 10-hour narrative form, but there's a depth and sense of layered warmth to Wilson's Lou, Dunst's Peggy and even Woodbine's Milligan that you occasionally miss amid the Coens' plotty machinations.

EXTRAS Featurettes, more. **DAN JOLIN**

ALSO OUT



The Leftovers: S2

★★★★★

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+**

DVD BR

With a shift in focus to the small Texas town of Jarden where no-one was taken by a world-wide wave of disappearances, S2 seriously steps up its game. Old elements (the Guilty Remnant cult) are better handled; new elements (the Murphy family) deepen the themes. The often devastating results result in truly brilliant television.

EXTRAS None. **ANTHONY MORRIS**



War & Peace

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+**

DVD BR

Director Tom Harper and writer Andrew Davies de-fustify Tolstoy, so successfully the book has become a bestseller for the first time in the UK. It's a demanding watch, but has vitality and style to spare. As for the huge cast, Lily James shines brightest as Natasha. Caution: features full-frontal nudity, amputations and a lengthy *mazurka*.

EXTRAS None. **NDS**



Downton Abbey: S6

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M**

DVD BR

For a show about a lost way of life, *Downton Abbey*'s never been one for big changes: progress marches on and the world is shattered by war but Lord Crawley's domain remains basically unchanged. So while this so-so final season features drama to spare, it all works out for the best.

EXTRAS Featurettes, more. **AM**



Peter Berg's director's cut of *Battleship* was... interesting.

Battleship Potemkin

★★★★★

1925 / FROM **NOW** / RATED **PG** / DIRECTOR **SERGEI M. EISENSTEIN** / CAST **ALEKSANDR ANTONOV, VLADIMIR BARSKY, GRIGORI ALEKSANDROV**

DVD

EISENSTEIN A GO-GO



THE FAVOURITE FILM OF Charlie Chaplin and Billy Wilder, *Battleship Potemkin* is so much more than a film where a pram rolls down some steps. In just 69 minutes it conjures up the drive and fever of revolution, from a mutiny on the titular vessel sparked by maggot-infested meat to a senseless massacre in Odessa to a nail-biting sea-set showdown, with a relentless energy that makes most blockbusters seem arthritic. It is a film full of memorable faces (non-actors), original compositions (cameraman Eduard Tisse strapped the camera to an acrobat who back-flipped to create vertiginous imagery), stunning juxtapositions and thrilling set-pieces (the flotilla of skiffs speeding to the Potemkin's aid is exhilarating). None are more memorable than the Odessa Steps sequence, a catalogue of Eisenstein's ideas about filmmaking in general — the personal is always imbued with the political — and rhythmic editing in particular that is as powerful as anything committed to celluloid.

EXTRAS None.

IAN FREER



One-Eyed Jacks

★★★★★

1961 / FROM **NOW** / RATED **G**

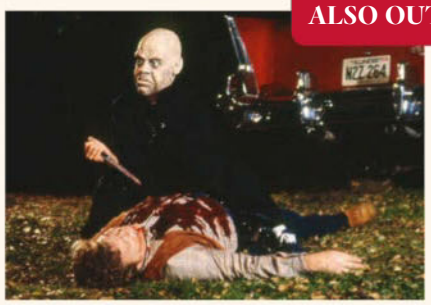
DVD

Opening on Marlon Brando as Rio, a gun-slinging outlaw robbing a bank with his buddies, *One-Eyed Jacks* starts out as your typical Western, but when Rio hunts down the man who betrayed him and the landscape shifts from Mexico to coastal California, Brando's first and only directing project morphs into something less recognisable. Contrasting scenes of rough-and-tumble violence and poignant romance are deftly woven into a genre-bending film that's equal parts brooding and badass. It's gratuitously lengthy, but nevertheless showcases brilliant cinematography and thoughtful performances with a refreshing dose of realism.

EXTRAS None.

JOHANNA GRUBER

ALSO OUT



Dead Kids

★★

1981 / FROM **NOW** / RATED **R18+**

DVD BR

Don't be put off by the title – this campy horror is nowhere near as gory or disturbing as it suggests. The mysterious scientist, the baffled police chief, the rubber-masked killer are all more *Scooby-Doo* than *American Werewolf*. If you love kitsch, there's plenty to cackle at, like the synchronised dancing scene – but it's all just too slow. The glacial pacing sucks the tension even from the rare bursts of action, and by the "shock" ending – which is simultaneously undercooked and woefully obvious – you'll be glad to stretch your legs. Except, no – there's another five-minute coda. You could edit this down to an okay *Twilight Zone* episode, but at 101 minutes, it's a drag.

EXTRAS Commentary, interviews. TIM KEEN



Night Of The Creeps

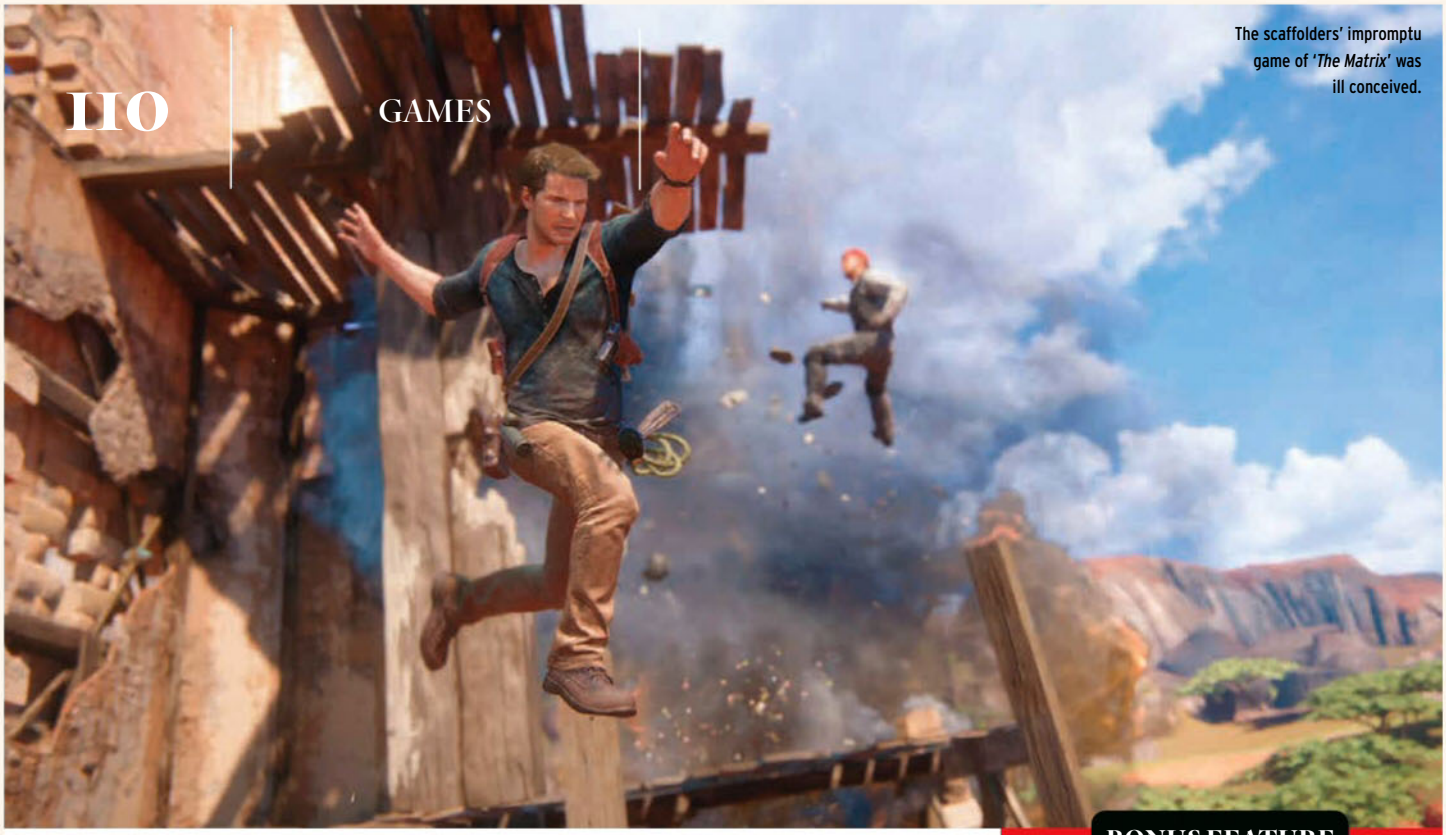
★★★★

1986 / FROM **NOW** / RATED **M**

DVD BR

Channelling David Cronenberg's *Shivers* and '80s comedy *Revenge Of The Nerds*, *Monster Squad* director Fred Dekker's debut feature is an affectionate pastiche of '50s creature feature chills and sci-fi paranoia brimming with frat house shenanigans, exploding heads and zombies controlled by squelchy space slugs. Starring John Carpenter alumni Tom Atkins as a wise-cracking police detective reliving the nightmare he witnessed back in the 1950s when an alien pod crashed to Earth, *Night Of The Creeps* – looking sharp in HD – is a hugely entertaining wink at the cult fodder that spawned a generation of filmmakers.

EXTRAS Making-of, director's commentary, original ending, deleted scenes, more. DMB



The scaffolders' impromptu game of '*The Matrix*' was ill conceived.





FIRST LOOK!

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End

OUT **MAY 10** / PS4 / RATED **MA15+**

A FORT MISSION



IN THE FOURTH AND FINAL outing in the *Uncharted* series, Nathan Drake is dragged back into the fortune hunting business when — bit of a spoiler alert here — his dead brother turns up, surprisingly still breathing, in search of — not really a spoiler here — a massive pirate treasure.

We only played a half-hour snippet of the game, to taste the new and expanded features, some influenced by the studio's acclaimed *The Last Of Us*. So take these impressions with a pinch of salt — but what we've seen looks very good.

Firstly, driving a Jeep — driving anything is a first for the *Uncharted* series, unless you count jet skis and, er, horses — across the plains of Madagascar (and yes, there are lemurs jumping around the place). The world isn't a completely open sandbox, but it's a bigger environment than previous chapters in the franchise. You can navigate a few different ways to your goal, figuring out how to cross crumbling bridges and winch your way up muddy slopes; there are ruins and red herrings to investigate on the way. The characters banter amongst themselves, and if you take too long, or drive too erratically, they'll gripe about it. The level of detail is staggering: driving the Jeep, you can see Drake actually changing gears as you go; power through a riverbank and the wheels emerge caked with mud, which slowly flings off as it dries.

And secondly, a combat stage, trading fire with a handful of mercenaries in a ruined fort. You have a variety of new moves and abilities available, which let you decide between a brute frontal attack, or a slyer quiet approach. The AI of both your companions and enemies is impressive; the former will hang back or work independently, as long as you're in control of the situation, but leap in promptly if you suddenly find yourself pinned down.

TIM KEEN

BONUS FEATURE

OFF THE CHARTS



ARNE MEYER OF *UNCHARTED* MAKER NAUGHTY DOG

You've said this is the last *Uncharted* – is it really the last, or is it like the *Fast & Furious* so if it makes a billion then you announce three more?
Ha ha, no, it's definitely the last, the way we've ended the narrative is that this will be the last one for us. We're in an interesting position in that we've committed to an additional single-player chapter that will be released as downloadable content, but we don't know what that is, or how it fits into the story. But as far as how the journey of this character ends, it ends here.

How attached do you get to a character, spending that many years with them?
That's a really philosophical question. I think we get attached to our characters in the way that we get to know them really intimately, and there are moments when we're exploring aspects of the narrative where we sit back and think, 'Would Drake be doing this?'. I think we're able to make difficult narrative choices and not be beholden to any one character, trying to protect them.

You always hurt the one you love...
We were very conscious when we looked at all four of the games as a whole, of showing the emotional toll these adventures have taken on Drake. Not just the physical toll, obviously he's aging in years, but he's aging because this is a hard life. There's a very poignant moment where he lays his head in his wife's lap, and it's basically that moment of "I'm too old for this shit." **TK**

"A ludicrously violent, fantastically loopy action classic."


1


2


3

Hard Boiled

1992 / OUT **NOW** / RATED **1R18+**

BULLET TIME

BACK IN 1992, *EMPIRE* UK'S REVIEW SLIGHTLY over-enthusiastically proclaimed *Hard Boiled* to be "more exciting than a dozen *Die Hards*". Two decades on, we can confirm that, adjusted for inflation, it's more exciting than 84 *A Good Day To Die Hards*. John Woo's bird-stuffed bullet ballet has been imitated by Hollywood, Kowloon, even Woo himself. It spawned a video-game sequel, *Stranglehold*. But there's only one *Hard Boiled*: a vastly stylish, ludicrously violent, fantastically loopy action classic in which a baby saves the day by peeing on a cop's flaming trousers.

For all its iconic moments and images, it was built on the fly. After releasing his equally masterful *The Killer* in 1989, Woo began getting offers from US studios. He decided to make one last film in Hong Kong, this time with a policeman hero every bit as badass as *The Killer's* assassin, and played by the same star: Chow Yun-Fat. Hence Inspector 'Tequila' Yuen, a lawman with inexhaustible ammo, a knack for swinging on ropes and a side-job playing jazz clarinet in a bar — essentially an unlikely hybrid of Arnie, Errol Flynn and Woody Allen. The film was set to pit Tequila against a psychopath (Tony Leung) bent on poisoning babies. But after a couple of weeks, Woo shut the shoot down. A month later, the cameras rolled again, this time with a radically different plot. Leung was now Alan, a cop deep undercover with the Triads, he and Tequila destined to become brothers-in-sidearms. From then on, Woo winged it, throwing in new characters and subplots (including a cameo from himself as a bartender) as he went along.

With all this going on, the film could have turned out soft-boiled. In fact, the behind-the-scenes turmoil sparked it into life. The movie is essentially three gargantuan action sequences — teahouse, warehouse, hospital — crammed with hyper-kinetic camerawork and inventive editing. Don't try to figure out the logistics of a scene; as Woo says on the DVD commentary, "Logic, to me, is boring." Instead, revel in the brio — slo-mo, flash-cuts, step-printing, freeze-frames, extreme close-ups and dizzyingly complex dolly shots. Pity the crew, who worked a series of punishing 20-hour days. Pity the locals, who called the police every night during the teahouse melee to complain about the noise. And pity the long-suffering Chow Yun-Fat, whose hair was singed after one particularly ebullient explosion.

The stylistic jewel in the crown comes during the hospital siege that takes up the entire second hour. Inspired by the maze scene from *The Shining*, Woo sent a camera hurtling after Chow and Leung as they stormed down two corridors, blowing away goons. Shot in a former Coca-Cola bottling plant, actual glass being blasted at by actual guns — albeit firing blanks — the CGI-free, near-three-minute-long tracking shot remains a jaw-dropping feat of choreography, especially given that the schedule only allowed one attempt. It is, to borrow Coke's slogan, the real thing.

But for all the hypnotic, athletic violence — and its bodycount of 307 might be untopped by any movie that doesn't feature an actual battle — there's more to *Hard Boiled* than double-fisted law-enforcement. Woo, who began his career making comedies, keeps his policier light. There's that urinating infant, the perfect tension-deflator. There's the astonishing sight of Chow Yun-Fat singing a line from Lionel Ritchie's *Hello*. And if you watch the dubbed version, you get some bonus unintentional comedy in the form of lines such as, "I've got more hostages than you've had hot dinners!"

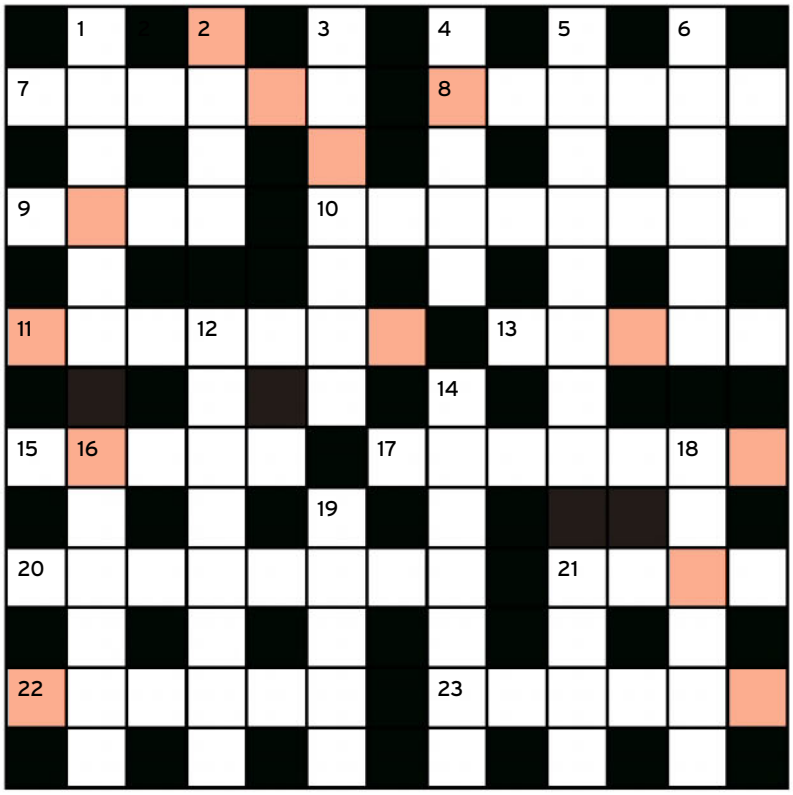
In 1976, Woo also made a Chinese opera, and the through-line is clear. *Hard Boiled* is far less interested in the mechanics of how the police force or Triads operate than in the concepts of brotherhood, betrayal and honour. There's a mythic quality to Tequila (who's capable of shooting a bullet from two metres away, a nod to Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Cercle Rouge*) and Alan (who makes an origami crane for each of his victims) that sets this aside from any other buddy-cop movie. As OTT as its mayhem gets, it remains soulful, languid, even poetic.

We never got a second shot of Tequila. Lured to Hollywood, Woo worked with Van Damme, Travolta and Affleck, before returning to China to mount expensive historical epics. But the influence of his Hong Kong swansong lives on — notably in Gareth Evans's *Raid* films, which named a character after honourable brute Mad Dog. And excitement started building when Woo announced at Cannes this year that he was returning to the cops-and-crims genre with *Manhunt*. With the master of gun-fu back after a lengthy break, somebody better warn the locals to expect some noise.

1 Alan (Tony Leung) in a rare shot that features only two guns.
2 Tequila (Chow Yun-Fat) with fellow cop/girlfriend Teresa (Teresa Mo).
3 Tequila executes a treehouse takedown.

WORDS
NICK DE SEMLYEN

THE *EMPIRE* CROSSWORD



ACROSS

7 Rock royal who provided *Purple Rain* (6)
8 Ridley Scott's bibically-inspired epic (6)
9 This Robert portrayed George Gershwin in *Rhapsody In Blue* (4)
10 Michael Winterbottom-directed film shot over five years (8)
11 In which Bill Clinton delivered his Mars rock speech (7)
13 This actor plays *The Expendables*' Yin Yang (5)
15 Michael, Martin or Charlie... (5)
17 In which Dustin became Dorothy (7)
20 Where Saoirse Ronan became an immigrant (8)
21 Did this item fly high for India Eisley? (4)
22 Philippe who was Alfredo in *Cinema Paradiso* (6)
23 It took Kate Winslet to Bletchley Park (6)

DOWN

1 Frank seen in *The Grey*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* etc. (6)
2 Paquin from the *X-Men* series (4)
3 Alfred Hitchcock's first US project (7)
4 *Jungle*, or possibly of the *Saturday Night* kind (5)
5 Confused Toby Head provides an erotic thriller for William Hurt and Kathleen Turner (4,4)
6 Robert – Best Actor Oscar winner for *Tender Mercies* (6)
12 Period that linked Julianne Moore, Nicole Kidman and Meryl Streep (3,5)
14 It provided Cicely Tyson with an Oscar nomination (7)
16 Werner, German director of *Queen Of The Desert* (6)
18 Did Justin Timberlake clock on for this one? (2,4)
19 For which Jane Fonda won a Best Actress Oscar (5)
21 Marshall seen in *Love Actually* (4)

APRIL ANSWERS

ACROSS **7** Rififi, **8** Oliver, **9** Demi, **10** Airplane, **11** Kingpin, **13** Croft, **15** Bambi, **17** Spectre, **20** Cellular, **21** Page, **23** Old Men, **24** Lethal.
DOWN **1** Life, **2** Viking, **3** Sicario, **4** Zorro, **5** Killer, **6** Jennifer, **12** Isabelle, **14** Sparkle, **16** Bel Ami, **18** Capote, **19** Clint, **22** Goal.
ANAGRAM LEONARDO DICAPRIO



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WIN! *Electric Slide* on DVD



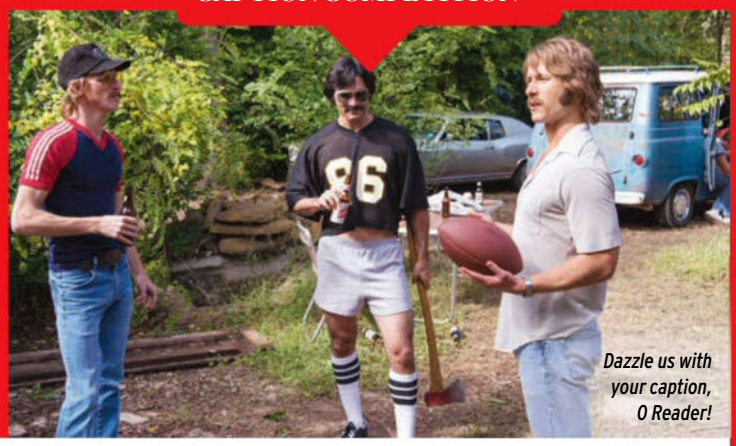
GET YOUR BONNIE AND CLYDE ON FOR THIS modern crime caper as James Franco, playing Eddie Dodson, tries to pay back a notorious loan shark while also living the high-life – with no money. Bag one of 10 DVDs we have up for grabs and you could be sliding a copy into your player. Cough.

TO WIN, TELL US WHO'S YOUR FAVOURITE FILM BANK ROBBER, AND WHY.

HOW TO ENTER

To win any of these prizes, email us at empiregiveaways@bauer-media.com.au, write the prize in the subject line, your preferred format if there are both DVD or Blu-ray options and complete the answer in 25 words or less, not forgetting to include your contact details. All competitions are open to both Australian and New Zealander *Empire* readers. Entries close May 4th, 2016.
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CAPTION THE IMAGE FROM *EVERYBODY* *Wants Some!!*, Richard Linklater's spiritual sequel to *Dazed And Confused*, and you could be taking home an awesome prize! We have actual movie props from *Deadpool* up for grabs. Yes, one lucky caption comper could be the proud owner of two glasses and a mug from Sister Margaret's Bar! That may have touched Ryan Reynolds's lips! *Deadpool* is available on Digital HD on May 11 and disc on May 25.







***EVERYBODY WANTS SOME!!* IS IN CINEMAS JUNE 23.**

HOW TO ENTER In 10 words or less email your caption with the subject **May 2016 Caption Comp** to **empiregiveaways@bauer-media.com.au.** The winner will be published in the July 2016 edition of *Empire*.

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EMPIRE CLASSIC SCENE

Night Of The Demon

"MY TIME ALLOWED?"

SETTING THE SCENE While let down by a demon that looks like a dodgy B-grade monster, Jacques Tourneur's 1957 horror classic remains a supremely creepy watch. Based loosely on M.R. James's short story *Casting The Runes*, it pits questioning academic John Holden (Dana Andrews) against diabolical Satanist/part-time children's entertainer Dr. Julian Karswell (Niall MacGinnis). After a visit to Karswell's country abode descends into chaos after it's hit by a freak storm, conjured by the host, it's revealed to Holden that he's been cursed – and hasn't got long to live.

INT. KARSWELL'S COUNTRY HOUSE — DAY

Holden: Where are the others?

Karswell: They probably went round by the back.

Holden: I didn't know you had cyclones in England.

Karswell: We don't. You probably could use a drink.

Holden: The perfect host.

Karswell: This way.

He leads Holden to a drinks cabinet in the drawing room and pours him a measure as the storm continues to rage outside.

Karswell: I'm sorry. I miscalculated. The wind's stronger than I expected. Much too much.

Holden: You're talking in riddles.

Karswell (*as he removes his clown make-up*): To prove my point. A medieval witch's specialty: a windstorm.

Holden: Take my professional advice and stick to rabbits and puppy dogs.

Karswell: You think I'm mad? Unfortunately, you won't be able to explain away your death on the 28th of this month so easily, with my prediction of it at this moment.

Holden (*seemingly amused*): You're really serious, aren't you?

Karswell: You will die as I said… at 10 o'clock on the 28th of this month. Your time allowed is just three days from now.

Holden: My time allowed? Oh, yes, your trick with the card. Very good too.

Karswell: I'm sorry you remain so sceptical. But as the time gets closer, mental disintegration will set in. First, weakness and unsureness. And then horror, as the fear of what is behind you grips your heart. Because it's there, Dr. Holden. It's there! It has been from the moment we met in the museum.

Holden (*incredulous*): You actually believe this nonsense.

Karswell: I asked you to drop this ridiculous investigation. Perhaps you will before it's too late.

Holden: Well, it's nice to know that I do have a way out, Mr. Karswell.

Karswell: The choice is yours.

A thunderclap rings out.

LIKE THIS, WATCH THIS



DRAG ME TO HELL

2009

Sam Raimi's own riff on the you've-been-cursed thriller, with loan officer Alison Lohman cursed by a gypsy. The highlight: a séance involving a talking goat.


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MEET THE PUNISHER

HOW THE WALKING DEAD BECAME THE BIGGEST SHOW ON U.S. CABLE

Why Game of Thrones Needs the Resurrection of Jon Snow

INSIDE SEASON 6 WITH THE CAST AND CREW

LEARN TO SAY "HOWZAT!" IN DOTHRAKI

BEGINS PAGE 36



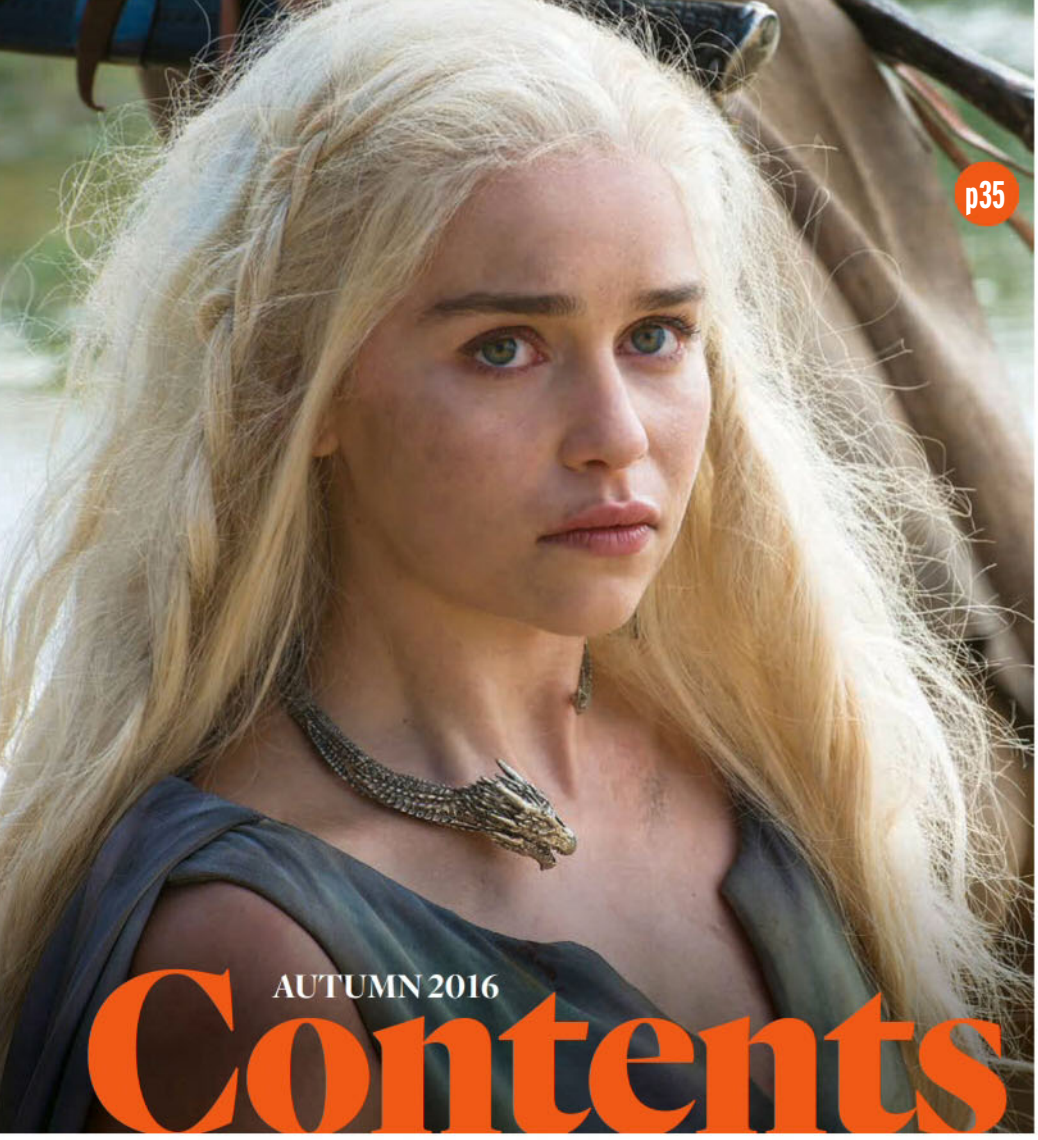
All the latest movies.

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Or: The Day The Nerds Took Over.

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Inside Season 6 with cast and the creators. Plus why Jon Snow must live (He just has to right?! I mean, come on!) and a history boffin reckons we've seen it all before. Pardon?

50 Tomorrow When The War Began
Yes, it was a book series. Yes, it was a movie. Yes, it is now a series on ABC3. Kablammo!

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Because one insanely successful zombie series is never enough.

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Dreamtime stories combine in a homegrown, hairy freakout. Sponsored by Schick.

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More Mick Taylor mayhem. Oh, God.

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Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin conquer the new 'blue-rinse family serio-comic' genre.

SHOWS TO WATCH PART 2: OUT NOW

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Inside a run-, well, walk-away success.

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Will Arnett heads to Venice Beach, begins lying. Actors.

85 11.22.63
Franco reveals why he couldn't say no to Stephen King's best novel in years.

86 Daredevil: S2
Specifically, its new player, the latest incarnation of The Punisher.

90 Pee-wee Herman
No fooling. Netflix and Paul Reubens combine for man-childishness.

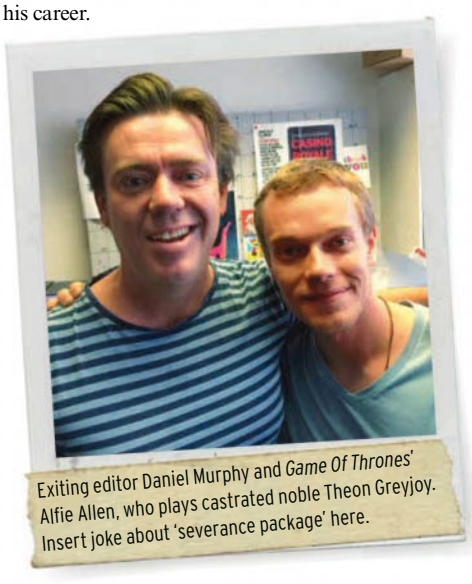
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The British spy novelist has two new adaptations on screens big and small.

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Kevin Spacey returns to *EmpireTV*. Donald Trump is surely not far away.

107 Re.View
Shows to collect, interviews with Alison Brie, Ellie Kemper, Scott Bakula, Guy Pearce and Aden Young, plus we go inside the making of a murder/phenomenon.

120 Masterpiece
A Kings Cross crime yarn so close to criminal truth it was banned in NSW for six years. Today, the NSW government is ensuring there's no-one left in the Cross for crime to occur.

122 Classic Scene
What our editor is doing with his career.



Exiting editor Daniel Murphy and *Game Of Thrones*' Alfie Allen, who plays castrated noble Theon Greyjoy. Insert joke about 'severance package' here.

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ROADSHOW ENTERTAINMENT

Credits

AUTUMN 2016

DUNNO WHETHER I MENTIONED IT OR NOT, BUT I WAS A Dungeons And Dragons kid. In 1984, my chums and I formed a team called (to my horror now) Rape And Pillage and entered the Tin Soldier Tournament held at the University Of Technology, Sydney. Sensibly (and much to my horror then), the organisers changed our name to Pape And Rillage so as not to completely offend and lend the band of tween warriors a sliver of actual wit.

If we — or any of the several hundred players beaming as they moved from room to room to roll 20-sided dice — had been told then that the two most supercharged and devoured shows on telly in 2016 would be the size and shape of *The Walking Dead* and *Game Of Thrones*, the reaction would have been disbelief, followed by a bowel-loosening excitement and not a smidge of jealousy. Fantasy and sci-fi was our shit, not everyone else's! And yet, here we are. *Everybody* loves it.

Thus, this fifth episode of *EmpireTV* looks at how genre stuff — horror, science fiction and fantasy — has climbed the ziggurat to rule big ticket narrative TV. It begins in our Insight feature, former Empirate and Syfy Channel presenter Oscar Hillerstrom traces the origins of the current bloom to its source (no real prize for guessing) and maps out a terrifying future. Find out at your peril on page 26.

Elsewhere British historian Tom Holland posits the reason *Game Of Thrones* is so mind-bogglingly successful is its deep roots in European medieval history. He makes a killer argument for it on page 46. The full coverage of Season 6 and Ian Nathan's piece on why Jon Snow needs to be The Known World's Jesus begins on page 36. Meanwhile, after its intense sixth season we examine how *The Walking Dead* has managed to make gore-drizzling misery the biggest thing on U.S. cable (page 76). All amid set visits for new Australian genre telly series, *Tomorrow When The War Began*, *Wolf Creek* and *Cleverman*. The '84 kids moving figurines around map paper arguing hit points would be freaking the hell out.

It's an apt memory upon which to finish my time at *Empire* — and apt that my final issue be an *EmpireTV*, as it was something the team and I conjured in 2014 and you embraced. One of the many reasons why I maintain in every meeting with every bigwig I have that *Empire*'s readers are the absolute best.

I leave here treasuring five years of memories working with my excellent friends, Dave, Craig, J.J., Bonnie and Aaron, and all at *Empire* UK. Plus watching, getting on-set of, heatedly discussing and sharing the magic of films and television shows for fun and profit; making beautiful mags for film lovers including special editions and *EmpireTV*; publishing the poster book set last year; winning the odd award; meeting loads of you at Oz Comic-Con; interviewing heroes, and generally having a ball.

I'm very concerned then to announce that my replacement, Tim Keen, will almost certainly be a vast improvement. Thus, please give him as hard a time as your cramped typing fingers will allow.

It's been my honour, you beautiful creatures. Thank you. I hope, as always, you dig this issue.

See you at the movies. (I'll be the fat guy just to the left of centre.)



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DANIEL
MURPHY



Team *Empire*, at the *SW:TFA* premiere, 2015: Craig Carroll, Moi, Kylo Ren, David Michael Brown, James Jennings, Daniel Craig.

EMPIRETV

(...and the dead TV character we'd like to see resurrected)

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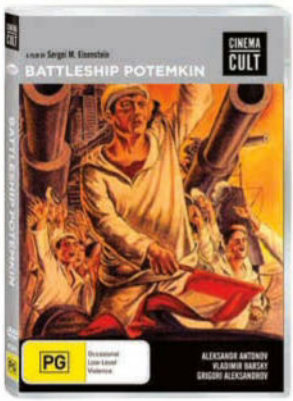
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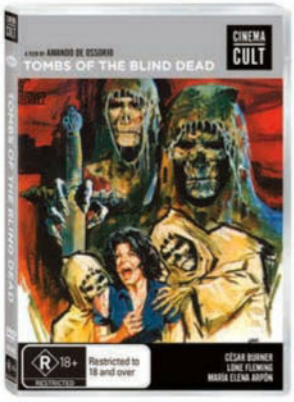
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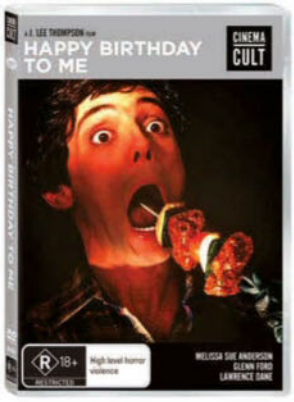


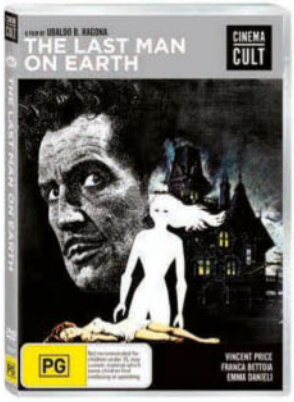


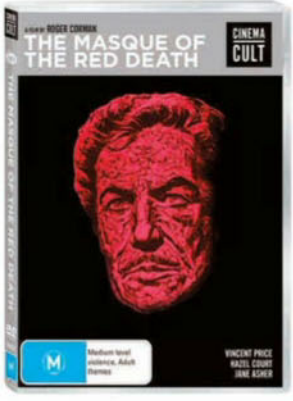














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The News



WARNING
CONTAINS REAL SEX...
(DISCUSSIONS)

THE FACE

THIS MAN WANTS TO HAVE SEX ~~WITH~~ FOR YOU

COMEDIAN LUKE MCGREGOR SHAGS FOR THE NATION IN NEW TV SERIES *LUKE WARM SEX*

GOOFY STAND-UP comic and sexual naïf Luke McGregor wants to get better between the sheets, for you, in the marvellously awkward investigative series, *Luke Warm Sex*. *EmpireTV* caught up with McGregor to discuss his quest to become a bedroom dynamo…

You admit that, at 33, you'd only slept with two people, which made you want to get better at sex. How does The 33-Year Old Almost Virgin host a show like this?
Northern Pictures' idea. They saw me do stand-up about sex, about how to get better at it. Like, do you hand out surveys at the end? Can you have a debrief? I didn't know anything about sex, I didn't know what topics to choose. It sort of started as me thinking "Oh, I guess I'll ›

learn a bunch of techniques." Then as we started writing it, I was like "Well I've just got a lot of hang-ups. I don't even like being naked with people." So that became about overcoming fears as well as learning.

You couldn't even talk about it?
Because I had only had sex twice, I was so frightened about people finding out how many times I've had sex, and, um, I had real trouble maintaining an erection. Sex just caused me so much anxiety. I still liked kissing and those sorts of things, but it had been such a scary part of my life for so long, that by the time I was 30 I was thinking I have to just deal with this.

Through the series you explore your own body with a therapist, do a dry-humping exercise called Pulse Of The Dragon, get nude to play snooker with mature naturists, it must have been confronting…
I actually was naked, the crew wasn't naked, the crew was still clothed. At one point I needed to borrow a cameraperson's notepad, and she dropped it as she was handing it to me, we bumped into each other as we tried to pick it up. I just said: "You just head back and I'll pick it up."



"I'm still massaging my perineum in the shower— it's part of my washing ritual."

What was the most confronting thing to do?
The nudity was the hardest thing. Second to that, I did a thing called "orgasmic meditation". It's an exercise where you stimulate the clitoris, and you need a partner to do it and I didn't have a partner, so I ended up doing it with a friend. I've only had sex with two people up to that point, so I've never had friends with benefits relationships. So she wanted to try it and I wanted to try it. But it was confronting to do that with someone who I wasn't in a relationship in with.

Erm, I gave my perineum a non-erotic massage this morning in the shower. Do people come up to you and start sharing?
Yeah, saying, "I just want to double-check whether I'm doing this right." It's strange though. Because up until that point, I've never really touched that area before.

It certainly is novel.
Yeah it is. There are a lot of things that I had never even thought of. The aphrodisiac stuff and what to eat and what makes 'it' taste bad. And then there's that lady who makes her life teaching people how to orgasm with their breath.

Did you manage it?
Oh no. It took her at least a year to get to the stage where she can have a full body orgasm through her breath. I gave it about five minutes. I couldn't quite get it.

Are you still massaging your perineum?
I am, in the shower. It's part of my washing ritual. Another part of me was thinking, 'Wow, I'd never washed that area before either.'

So, are you now a sexual Tyrannosaur?
I dunno, it was kind of gradual; it's kind of like working out. You sort of start to notice little incremental improvements, almost invisible. Then I was in amongst a group of strangers I didn't know well, I said "penis" instead of using another word for it.

Thanks for sharing.
My pleasure. Well… DANIEL MURPHY

LUKE WARM SEX IS ON THE ABC ON WEDNESDAY NIGHTS AT 9PM AND STREAMED ON iVIEW.





50 Shades Of Red: Shy guy comedian Luke McGregor's odyssey takes him (from top) into naturist Stuart Whelan's home; offering free kisses in Melbourne; feeling the Pulse Of The Dragon with therapist Barbara Ma-El.

> *FRINGE*'S ANNA TORV TO HEADLINE DAVID FINCHER'S NETFLIX SERIES *MINDHUNTER*



Jessica Jones star Krysten Ritter claims there was "nothing sexy" about doing controversial sex scenes with co-star Mike Colter.



Lena Waithe's performance in Aziz Ansari's *Master Of None* has lead to a deluge of marriage proposals. "I've said 'No' to a lot of people."



Inside Amy Schumer co-star Greta Lee thinks the show's star could run for President of the United States and win.



CNN founder Ted Turner tops Jane Fonda's "Favourite ex-husband" list. Roger Vadim and activist Tom Hayden battle for second place.



Sam Elliott, Ashton Kutcher and Danny Masterson in *The Ranch*.

STAR REUNION

THOSE '70s DUDES

ASHTON KUTCHER AND DANNY MASTERSON RECONNECT AND ESCHEW THE CLOUDY BASEMENT SCENES FOR *THE RANCH*

HAVING ESTABLISHED impeccable comic chemistry playing Michael Kelso and Stephen Hyde on retro sitcom *That '70s Show*, Ashton Kutcher and Danny Masterson re-team for Netflix's original comedy-drama *The Ranch*. Co-starring Debra Winger and Sam Elliot (could you have a TV show called *The Ranch* and *not* cast Sam Elliot?), the 10-episode first series (a second is already planned) stars Kutcher as a retired football player who returns to Colorado to run the family farm with his brother (Masterson) and father (Elliot. Winger, if you hadn't guessed, plays mum, or mom). "We did eight years of *'70s Show*," says Masterson, explaining how he and Kutcher came to be working together again, "then spent a few years doing different projects. But we always talked about getting back together to do something else. Our favourite stuff on *'70s Show* was always the Hyde-Kelso relationship of domination and abuse. So when this show was coming together, the thought was, 'Let's find adult versions of those guys, make it a little more realistic but keep the same comedy dynamic.'"

The Ranch also re-unites Kutcher with Don Reo and Jim Patterson, former exec producers and show-runners of *Two-And-A-Half Men*, the sitcom on which he replaced a recalcitrant Charlie Sheen in 2011 (Sheen famously threatened to put him "On a hospital food diet for a year" after Kutcher told him to "Shut the fuck up" during an interview on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*). "When that show was wrapping up we asked ourselves, Is there something else we can do? We just wanted to keep working together," says Kutcher, "and Danny and I have wanted to do something, for years, so it all came together very serendipitously."

"Actually," deadpans Patterson, "Ashton is contractually obliged to do whatever we want."

A reunited Kutcher and Masterson, who are also exec producing, is good news for fans of *That '70s Show*, but anyone expecting similar family-friendly stoner antics will be disappointed. With an equal emphasis on drama and comedy, *The Ranch* takes full advantage of its Netflix license. "It's honest," says Kutcher, defending the show's profanity-strewn dialogue. "It's about a hardworking middle-American family trying to keep their heads above water. And our earnest intention is to show that world the way we know it to be." So, don't hold your breath for a guest spot from Wilmer Valderama. SIMON BRAUND

***THE RANCH* IS ON NETFLIX NOW.**

> GEENA DAVIS TO STAR IN FOX'S *THE EXORCIST* REBOOT > JIMMY SMITS JOINS *24: LEGACY*



FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

OUT OF THE OFFICE

RICKY GERVAIS HEADS TO NETFLIX FOR HIS NEXT MOVIE

ON THE DAY *EMPIRETV* visits the Toronto set of Ricky Gervais's latest film, he's overseeing a scene where two journalists are on their knees, with guns pointed at their heads. It would be tempting to read symbolism into the set-up. Gervais has had a shifting relationship with the fourth estate over the years. In the days of *The Office* he could do no wrong, rightly celebrated for creating one of the best sitcoms in history. Since then, a perceived cockiness has turned certain parts of the press against him. Is he about to take his revenge?

Well, no. *Special Correspondents* is a comedy, a very loose remake of 2009 French film *Envoyés Très Spéciaux*, and the two men with guns to their heads are Eric Bana and Gervais himself. The pair play a radio journalist and his technician who were supposed to be reporting from the frontline of a South American war, but a mixture of arrogance and foolishness meant they never made it out of New York. Rather than admit their screw-up and lose their jobs, they hole up in a flat and start filing fake reports, pretending they're in the thick of the fighting. Today they're staging their own kidnapping — the 'militia' holding them hostage are their neighbours, America Ferrara and Raúl Castillo.



> JULIA LOUIS-DREYFUS TO PRODUCE HBO MINISERIES *SOLDIER GIRLS* > *EMPIRE*'S JUSTIN









"Like a lot of my work, this is about ordinary people out of their depth," says Gervais, who directs and writes. "I think that's what comedy is: an ordinary person trying to do something extraordinary but they haven't got the tools."

For his first film-directing job in six years, Gervais has hitched himself to the Netflix juggernaut, something he says he did because "they just leave you alone. I like to get my own way," he grins. "And to get my own way, I've always had to go to fringe channels. BBC2. Channel 4. HBO. Now Netflix comes along and says, 'Not only can you do what you want, but the sky's the limit in terms of ratings.' Why wouldn't I jump on that?" **OLLY RICHARDS**

***SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS* IS ON NETFLIX FROM APRIL 29.**

Above: Lounging around: Eric Bana, Ricky Gervais, America Ferrera and Raúl Castillo.
Left: Radio journalist Frank Bonneville (Eric Bana) and his technician Albert Finch (Ricky Gervais) are living the lie.
Right (top to bottom): Frank and Finch are in a Jeep, somewhere; then a van, elsewhere; Claire Maddox (Kelly Macdonald) and Eleanor Finch (Vera Farmiga) play nice.

CORNWELL SCORES LEAD IN *TRAINING DAY* PILOT > *MACGYVER* REBOOT HEADING TO CBS

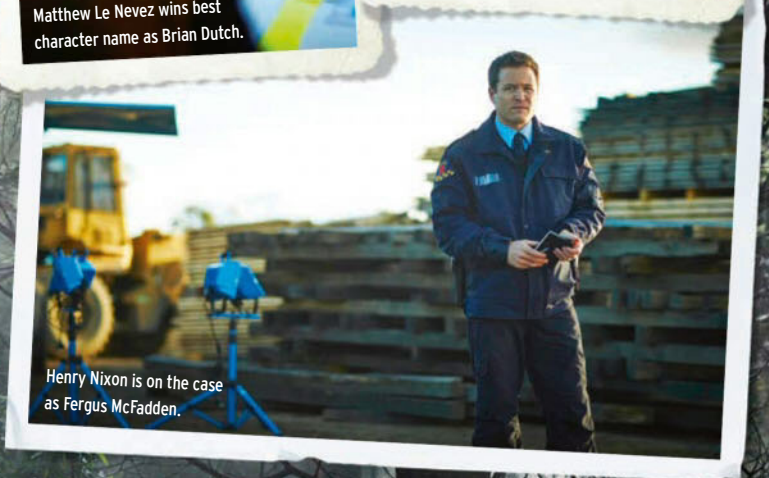
NEED TO KNOW
Victoria Madden's resume includes *The Bill* and *Halifax FP*, while Vincent Sheehan helped steer *Animal Kingdom*, *The Hunter* and *The Rover* to completion.



Loggers, eyeballing something extra-terrestrial. Or Bob Brown.


Matthew Le Nevez wins best character name as Brian Dutch.


Elizabeth Debicki stars as Dr. Anna Macy.


Henry Nixon is on the case as Fergus McFadden.

Five Things
THE KETTERING INCIDENT

CO-CREATORS VICTORIA MADDEN AND VINCENT SHEEHAN ON BRINGING SHOWCASE'S HAUNTING MYSTERY DRAMA *THE KETTERING INCIDENT* TO LIFE.

1 TASMANIAN GOTHIC

The Kettering Incident's showrunners wanted to invoke the island's mysterious heart in their story of troubled Dr. Anna Macy (Elizabeth Debicki) whose smalltown return is connected to the strange forest disappearances of two girls, 15 years apart. "Tasmania has got a disproportionately large number of otherworldly activity phenomena from missing people cases in very strange circumstances to lights in the sky and UFO sightings," says Vincent Sheehan.

2 BORN OF UFOS AND MONSTERS

Some of the inspiration comes from the "odd" childhood experiences of Victoria Madden herself. There's the mysterious disappearance of a man on her family's North Eastern Tasmanian property or the terrifying creature sighting by Madden and her mother. "A really strange experience that prompted my fascination for all things sort of otherworldly," says Madden.

3 THE TRUTH IS IN THERE

The mystery and sci-fi elements of *The Kettering Incident* were a way in for the show's creators to a very real portrait of smalltown life set against the backdrop of Tasmania's forest wars. "You have to ground these stories more than, say, making a sensational UFO story," says Madden.

4 BRIGHT STAR

A star ascendant, Elizabeth Debicki (*The Great Gatsby*) wasn't the first choice to play the troubled Anna, but her persistence paid off. "She was 23 when she did this and I've never spoken to anyone – actor-wise – that has so much understanding of the themes we're trying to explore. She's quite extraordinary," says Madden.

5 A SCANDI DARKLY

Apart from what Madden calls "genre splicing" – in this case the UK's blending of crime with the supernatural – moody "Danish dramas and winter" were a huge influence on *The Kettering Incident*. "We wanted gothic, gothic melancholy," laughs Madden.

JIM MITCHELL

***THE KETTERING INCIDENT* WILL SCREEN ON SHOWCASE THIS WINTER.**

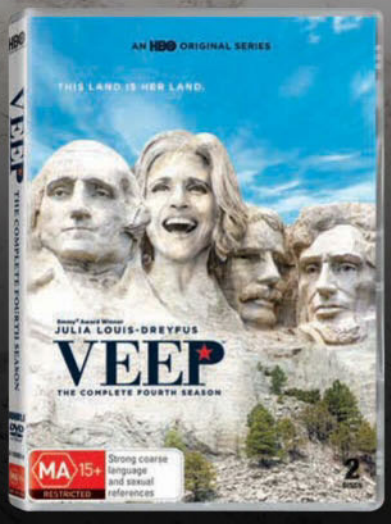
› *MAD MEN*'S KEVIN RAHM TO JOIN FOX'S *LETHAL WEAPON* PILOT › *THE TICK* WILL RETURN

‘Brilliant writing, direction and performances’
Independant

‘Rewind. Rewatch. It’s that good.’
The Hollywood Reporter

‘Instantly engaging and outrageously fun’
The Washington Post





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PILOT TRAINING

FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!



ABC LAUNCHES SIX COMEDY PILOTS AT ONCE – AND VIEWERS GET TO VOTE WHICH ONES GO TO SERIES...

FROM *THE NORMAN Gunston Show* to *The D-Generation* to *The Late Show* to *The Micallef Program* and beyond, ABC TV has always been a fertile birthplace for a slew of classic comedy shows. Their latest initiative is the *Comedy Showroom* which ambitiously aims to screen six pilots from six of the country's best comics and creative teams, with viewers able to cast their vote as to which programs they'd like to see be commissioned for a series. ABC Head of Comedy Rick Kalowski talks *EmpireTV* through the comedy shows that are awaiting your support.

1 THE FUTURE IS EXPENSIVE

STARS **EDDIE PERFECT, LEEANNA WALSMAN, MADELEINE WEST, FIONA HARRIS**

"This is probably the most novel one," says Kalowski. "Eddie is the creator, writer and star. It's directed by Matt Saville, who did *Please Like Me* and it's produced by Rosemary Blight, who made *The Sapphires*. It's like a suburban family comedy where every episode starts in an everyday way, but you illustrate these satirical points with crazy stuff. So a scene might be a kid in a park, and by the end of that he's being chased by 50 parents on bikes, and it's like a recreation of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*."

2 MOONMAN

STARS **LAWRENCE MOONEY, IAN SMITH**

"It's directed by Clayton Jacobson who did *Kenny*, and has Lawrence Mooney play a fictional version of himself, sort of a deadbeat graveyard shift DJ who at the age of 50 hasn't grown up, and who proposes to his girlfriend when she gets pregnant. He has to work out if he can stop being a man-child before he loses her and the baby. It's very good."

3 BLEAK

STARS **KATE MCLENNAN, SHANE BOURNE, JEAN KITTSON, BROOKE SATCHWELL**



"This comes from Kate McCartney and Kate McLennan from *The Katering Show*. It's a look at a stage in many young women's lives, when they've had these terrible times in their twenties and they think when they hit 30 it's all going to turn around. In *Bleak*, Kate McLennan's character hits 30 and her entire life goes to shit — her boyfriend's cheating, she gets fired and she ends up moving back home with her insane parents. It's incredibly black but very funny."

4 RONNY CHIENG: INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

STARS **RONNY CHIENG, MOLLY DANIELS, HOA XUANDE, DAVE EASTGATE**

"Ronny's a stand-up who's now on the US *Daily Show*, he's just an incredible talent. He came through the door with this idea *Ronny Chieng: International Student*, and we haven't done a show in this country about that very fundamental sort of international student experience, and unis are such a fun vehicle for exploring cross-cultural relations and the growing level of intolerance in this country, and the pilot has come out fantastically well."

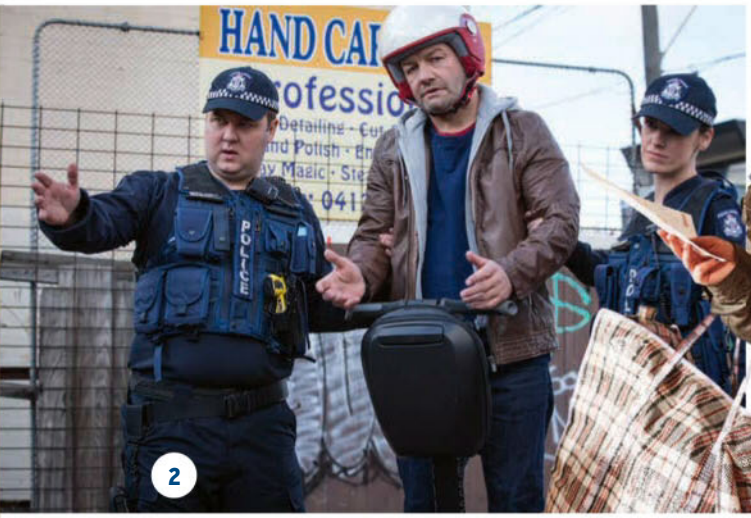
5 THE LETDOWN

STARS **ALISON BELL, : NONI HAZLEHURST, LUCY DURACK, SACHA HORLER**

"This is the first scripted show from the Chaser guys. It's a dramedy about a

Below left inset: ABC Head of Comedy Rick Kalowski.

> *THE WALKING DEAD* RIDE TO OPEN AT UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOLLYWOOD > MATTHEW PERRY TO



2


3


4


5

young mum played by Alison Bell who wants to believe she's coping with this baby but she's not, and she goes to a mothers group full of oddballs that she doesn't want anything to do with, and then realises the only way she's going to get through it is by befriending them."

6 THE LEGEND OF GAVIN TANNER

STARS **MATT LOVKIS, MANDY MCELHINNEY**

"It's a very raucous kind of bogan comedy, like a comedy version of *Chopper*, about a deadbeat weed dealer from a shitty town in Western Australia who is deeply insecure and sort of sets out every week to try and prove that he's the biggest legend in town with catastrophic results. He's a classic comic loser like David Brent, but he's got a mohawk. Really, really funny pilot."

JAMES JENNINGS

COMEDY SHOWROOM **STARTS WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27 ON ABC TV AND ALL SIX PILOTS WILL BE AVAILABLE TO WATCH ON ABC iVIEW.**


6

MORE SPARKLE

THE SAPPHIRES, YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS



AFTER EARNING ALMOST $15 MILLION AT THE Aussie box office in 2012, it was inevitable we would hear more from *The Sapphires*. Now, with a nod to *The Jackson 5ive* cartoons of the '70s, the women of soul are back to make a song and dance in the world of animation.

Based on the true story of a group of Aboriginal songbirds who travelled to Vietnam to entertain the troops, the much loved smash starred Deborah Mailman, Jessica Mauboy, Miranda Tapsell and Shari Sebbens as the singers and Chris O'Dowd as their makeshift manager. Fusing social comment with a footstomping good time, the new cartoon *Sapphires* wants to replicate the heart and soul of the movie for a younger demographic, as Goalpost Picture's Kylie du Fresne explains: "The characters are strong and inspiring role models and it is exciting for us to see the connection with a young audience."

Presently in the final stages of development for the ABC and working again with writers Tony Briggs and Keith Thompson, Goalpost are teaming up with animation house Sticky Pictures (*Dennis The Menace And Gnasher*) to bring the girls colourful adventures to the small screen.

"The success of *The Sapphires* feature film is testament to the appeal of strong timeless storylines, inspiring characters and fantastic tunes," explains Sticky Pictures' Donna Andrews. "It's these ingredients that we will combine with rich animation to bring to life a series for young and family audiences globally." They'll take you there. **DMB**

PLAY TED KENNEDY IN *THE KENNEDYS: AFTER CAMELOT* > CRAIG ROBINSON LANDS *MR. ROBOT* ROLE



WORLD (S)EXCLUSIVE!

GOING UNDERGROUND

THE *SOUL MATES* BOYS GET DOWN AND DIRTY FILMING SEASON 2...

WORDS **JIM MITCHELL**

IN LITTLE MORE THAN A loincloth, Christiaan Van Vuuren introduces himself to *EmpireTV* and takes a seat next to a split screen. He's covered in dusty muck to play tomb slave Amram, one of the central quartet of new characters for the second season of *Soul Mates*, created by Van Vuuren, brother Connor (who both write and direct) and Nick Boshier.

Currently all three are in an inner-western Sydney studio on the ancient Egypt-styled set of Queen Hatshepsut's palace, as the team takes aim at big budget, sexed-up fantasy dramas. Boshier has transformed into Seti, the bald, bronzed and very needy master of, and best mate to, Amram. Seti is tomb architect and bastard son to Hatshepsut (Doris Younane, who sits on a throne amid sphinxes and other props from recent film *Gods Of Egypt*), and chief competitor for her affections with half-sibling Thutmose (former rugby league player turned actor Ian Roberts, today topless and wearing an elaborate bird mask).

"All the family stuff is all drawn from *Game Of Thrones* and *Vikings* and all the epic HBO stuff," explains Van Vuuren. "All the jokes in the tomb are taking the piss out of all the traps that Indiana Jones comes across in *The Temple Of Doom* and all the things from *Tomb Raider*."

"In every one of these movies there's some doorway where people just go 'Anuxinamoon' and the doorways rise. Like, how do you do that? With voice activation? There was no Siri in fuckin' ancient Egypt — that we know of. So practically it was fun to approach dissecting and over-analysing each of those traps that we all know from the movies."

The cameras roll as Seti hands over the keys to a new tomb to Hatshepsut who grants Amram his freedom on the one condition that he never sees Seti again.

"You can't do that Mummy! You can't tear us apart, you can't!" bellows Boshier, becoming comically more and more distraught.

"Life's not fair darling," says Younane. "That's why we have the afterlife."

The only thing that will console Seti is for mum to lift her dress, open her legs and let her son get busy.

"Hand on the back of his head Doris!" yells Connor Van Vuuren, who is directing today's scene.

"That's good darling, you're doing very well," coaches Younane's Hatshepsut, feigning climaxing while looking like she'd rather be eating sand: "Mmm, oooh I can feel it now. Yes! Very good. Oooooh. Bring it home Seti!"

"How am I going mother? Better than Thutmose?" says Boshier, coming up for air.

› *THE OFFICE*'S JENNA FISCHER TO STAR OPPOSITE MATT LEBLANC IN UNTITLED CBS COMEDY





Clockwise from top left: Bondi Hipsters Dom (Christiaan Van Vuuren) and Adrian (Nick Boshier) plot their own coffee spot; Sticks (Boshier) and Rocky (Van Vuuren) prepare to meet the tribe; Amram (Van Vuuren) meets his mummy; Kiwi assassins Thinge (Boshier) and Roger (Van Vuuren) take aim.

"Poor boy. It's hot down there!" quips Younane post-take.

Sure it's grotesque, but as Boshier and Van Vuuren point out over lunch, it takes some serious one-upmanship to outdo a show like *Game Of Thrones*.

"It opens up a fuckin' gateway to darkness because that show is so dark," says Van Vuuren. "To be satirical of it, you have to go to really weird places."

"There's a scene where Seti's trying to explain his Unky Dad-Pa because the same guy is his Uncle, his Dad and his Grandpa."

Funnily enough, the depravity of today's scene wasn't scripted but an improvisation, a perfect opportunity, says Boshier (who is "unhealthily obsessed" with *Game Of Thrones*) to skewer its infamous sexposition.

"If they need to tell a story they just start bumping a few bodies together and fuck out the story," he says. "Who successfully talks about logistics when they're having sex?"

A bigger budget — in part because of a co-funding arrangement with NBC Universal's Seeso streaming platform — everything this time around is bigger and more ambitious from sets to stunts and action sequences, costumes and locations (filming for tomb sequences recently took place in one of Sydney's underground network of tunnels).

"I feel like we went and wrote a $6 million show," says Van Vuuren in what is looking like a cast lunch mash-up of *Game Of Thrones* and *300*.

Storylines for returning characters have been expanded too. Cavemen Sticks (Boshier) and Rocky (Van Vuuren) now have a tribe to interact with, and Kiwi Assassins Roger (Van Vuuren) and Thinge (Boshier) go undercover into the Sydney private school system to expose its less than covert trafficking of Maori and Islander rugby players to ensure Australia's national team is a winner. .

Foundation characters, the Bondi Hipsters Dom (Van Vuuren) and Adrian (Boshier), are back this time taking the mickey out of coffee culture as the boys open the most underground café in Bondi, 'The Closed Café'.

"It's so underground and cutting edge that it's got a 'closed' theme," explains Boshier. "We're telling people to get out and we're in janitor uniforms cleaning the floor and the chairs are always overturned and placed on the tables."

Any trending topic is fair game.

"We're on to the transgender thing now. That's all the rage," says Boshier. "Let's hope we've found the line."

Quips Van Vuuren: "And stomped on it!"

***SOUL MATES* SEASON 2 AIRS ON THE ABC AND SEESO LATER THIS YEAR.**

THE NEW (OLD) ONES



SETI
NICK BOSHIER
Tomb architect, trap inventor and bastard son to Queen Hatshepsut, Seti struggles with the master-slave dynamic, desperately clasping to his 'best friendship' with slave Amram. Seti has serious mummy issues. And not the bandaged kind.



AMRAM
CHRISTIAAN VAN VUUREN
Tomb slave and trap builder. Stubborn, practical and pragmatic in the style of a complaining, fussy Australian builder. Probably pretending to be Seti's bestie only to eventually secure his freedom.

HATSHEPSUT
DORIS YOUNANE
Egyptian Queen who knows how to get an empire built in a man's world. Plays her two idiot sons Seti and Thutmose off each other for her affections to maintain power. Good sport in suffering the attentions of her needy son Seti.



THUTMOSE
IAN ROBERTS
Seti's muscled up half-brother and love rival. Hatshepsut knew when she gave birth to him and looked into his beautiful face that this was the son she would one day marry.

› PATRICK WARBURTON IS LEMONY SNICKET FOR NETFLIX'S *A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS*

STIR CRAZIES

FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

THE NETFLIX PRISON DRAMA IS BACK – ORANGE YOU GLAD?

CALL IT A COMEDY, CALL IT A DRAMA. HELL, call it a dramedy, but either way *Orange Is The New Black* is arguably Netflix's most bingeable original series. Over the past three seasons, we've seen nice-girl Piper (Taylor Schilling) go from wide-eyed noob in Litchfield Prison to a criminal kingpin (ruling an empire selling inmates' used panties to web pervs — it's that sort of a show).

Along the way, the show has been praised for its unflinching portrayal of issues such as gender identity, racism and rape. Last season turned a spotlight on the US prison system itself, as a for-profit corporation took over Litchfield with predictably horrendous results. And it looks as though Season 4 will turn that screw even harder. On our tour of the set, *EmpireTV* clocks that the already-cramped beds in the sleeping quarters have been replaced with bunk-beds — suggesting more new inmates. "There's gonna be new blood — and that's gonna make blood boil!" Selenis Leyva, who plays leader of the Latina clique Gloria, whispers to *EmpireTV*. And even though she's got a smile on her face, it's hard not to believe her.

We come to an overcrowded cafeteria, where the atmosphere is rowdy and relaxed. Dozens of beige-clad women (orange is relatively scarce) are watching, weirdly, *The Wiz*, but it's here where the show's true power hits home. The nearly wholly female cast is powerfully diverse, in age, ethnicity and sexuality (you've never seen a women's prison shower scene like the ones in this show). Actresses who spent careers playing wives and girlfriends are now centre-stage, and having a blast. "We don't stay in our dressing rooms. We all pile into one and talk about J-Lo, or what food makes us gassy," laughs Leyva.

With three more seasons newly ordered — taking us up to Season 7 — it's clear that this is one Orange that won't run out of juice. But given Piper was initially serving a 15-month sentence, that is something the show will have to revise if Schilling's going to stay the course. It seems Season 4 may be taking care of that.

"She's still pushing at her limits," says Schilling. "This season she's going to break through to the other side." Sounds like Piper might be about to break. The Litchfield redemption has been postponed. **SARAH MORGAN**

***ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK* SEASON 4 IS ON NETFLIX FROM JUNE 17.**





> DANNY BOYLE TO DIRECT SEASON 1 OF GETTY FAMILY DRAMA *TRUST* > AZIZ ANSARI'S *MASTER*

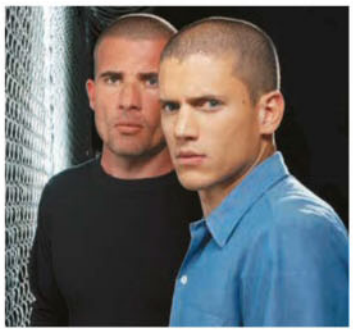




1 Taylor Schilling as Piper Chapman receives some direction on set.
2 Lorna Morello (Yael Stone) gives Suzanne 'Crazy Eyes' Warren (Uzo Aduba) a talking to.
3 Piper with her on-off lover Alex Vause (Laura Prepon).

BREAKING BACK

PRISON BREAK IS ON THE RUN AGAIN

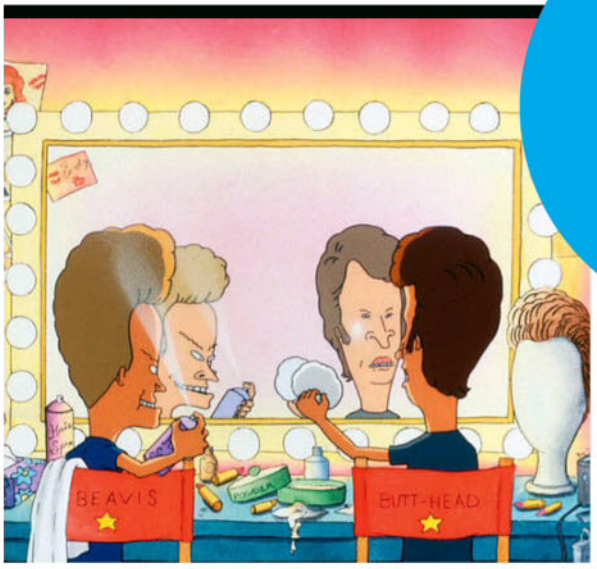


AS ONE SET OF PRISON DOORS OPEN, another... also open. After a hiatus of five years, *Prison Break* – the ludicrously enjoyable Fox TV show about a pair of brothers who travel the world indulging their hobby of absconding from seemingly inescapable fortresses – is back.

Like previous Fox shows *24* and more recently *The X-Files*, *Prison Break* will be enjoying a revival as a limited edition 'event series', and will start shooting in Vancouver soon. Although the show was cancelled after four seasons of increasingly diminishing returns in both storytelling and ratings, there's been a recent surge of interest thanks to the show pitching up on Netflix, and the reunion of Wentworth Miller and Dominic Purcell, who played the brothers at the show's heart, in both *The Flash* and *Legends Of Tomorrow*.

The new show will focus on siblings Michael Scofield (Miller) and Lincoln Burrows (Purcell), along with the returning likes of Sarah Wayne Callies (Sara), Robert Knepper (T-Bag) and new cast member Mark Feuerstein, while the show's creator, Paul Scheuring, is also back on board. Plot details are under wraps, but we're guessing a prison will be involved.

Fans of the show might be intrigued by Miller's involvement. After all, the show ended with Michael biting the dust in fairly unequivocal fashion. Perhaps the prison he's breaking out of could be his coffin. We'll find out when it airs later this year. **CH**



THE C.V.



Mike Judge

THE *SILICON VALLEY* CREATOR ON HIS WELL-DRAWN CAREER.

I HAD THIS SHORT FILM THAT TURNED INTO A SHOW AND I REALLY DID HAVE TWO BILLIONAIRES BATTLING OVER IT AT ONE POINT.*

*Producer David Geffen and Viacom chief Sumner Redstone once butted heads over who had the rights to a *Beavis And Butt-Head* movie.

EXPERIENCE

1993 – 2011
Beavis And Butt-Head
Creator / writer / voice cast

I just had the drawings and I didn't really have an idea of what they would sound like. Beavis's laugh was kind of based on a guy who wasn't anything like Beavis. He was actually a straight-A student, he's actually an engineer now. He would sit at the front of class and we had a really attractive math teacher that, God, everybody had a crush on. He would just sit in the front of the class and just laugh at everything she said, kind of biting his lip with this nervous grunt of a laugh, this 'huhm, huhm huhm, huhm.' I kind of got the laugh from that kid but that was really all, he didn't talk like that. I also wanted him to sound very different from Butt-Head so I just made him sound as coarse and gravelly as possible.



1996
Beavis And Butt-Head Do America
Writer / director / voice cast

1997 – 2010
King Of The Hill
Creator / writer / voice cast



1999
Office Space
Writer / director

I watched it again at the 10-year anniversary. I forgot how much anger I put into it! It just struck me that those kinds of jobs just drove me crazy and it just struck me that most people in the world do this and Hollywood barely even talks about it. There are movies about offices but they weren't to me really showing the drudgery of it, the parts that are really annoying. It was interesting when the movie came out, with focus groups there were people who hadn't even worked in a cubicle yet, like young people who were still in college or high school that liked it because they saw it as somebody making fun of their parents I guess. I guess people still like it because that world is still the world we're in I think, to some extent.

IT WAS KIND OF FUNNY AT FIRST, NOW IT'S JUST GETTING A LITTLE WEIRD AND SCARY. IT'S REALLY BIZARRE. I GET TWITTER COMMENTS ALL DAY LONG ABOUT IT. AS MUCH AS I LIKE *IDIOCRACY* THE MOVIE SUCCEEDING IN A WAY, I DIDN'T WANT IT TO SUCCEED IN THIS WAY, WITH THE WORLD BECOMING LIKE *IDIOCRACY*! IT'S VERY SURREAL.

2006
Idiocracy
Writer / director



2009
Extract
Writer / director

2014 – TO PRESENT
Silicon Valley
Creator / writer / director

A lot of my best friends from back in the day are programmers and I used to be an engineer so I feel like I can make fun of them. A lot of the tech world is very kind of arrogant and smug and I think people enjoy watching someone make fun of that because it's in your face. Another thing that people respond to is that the tech world, they're capitalists like anybody else but they're kind of shrouded in all this, 'We're making the world a better place' stuff, like they're doing the world a favour. I think it's about time someone made fun of that.

There's also gonna be sexual intercourse and some robots.

SKILLS

Doodling, voice generating, cameo-ing. Sticking it to the man, advocating corporate drones, desk jockeying. Writing cult favourite TV shows and films. Creating teen degenerates. Billionaire wrangling. Unsettlingly accurate prognosticating.

JIM MITCHELL

***SILICON VALLEY* S2 IS OUT ON DVD AND BLU-RAY APRIL 20. S3 AIRS ON THE COMEDY CHANNEL FROM 8.30PM TUESDAY, APRIL 26.**

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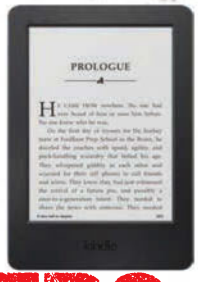
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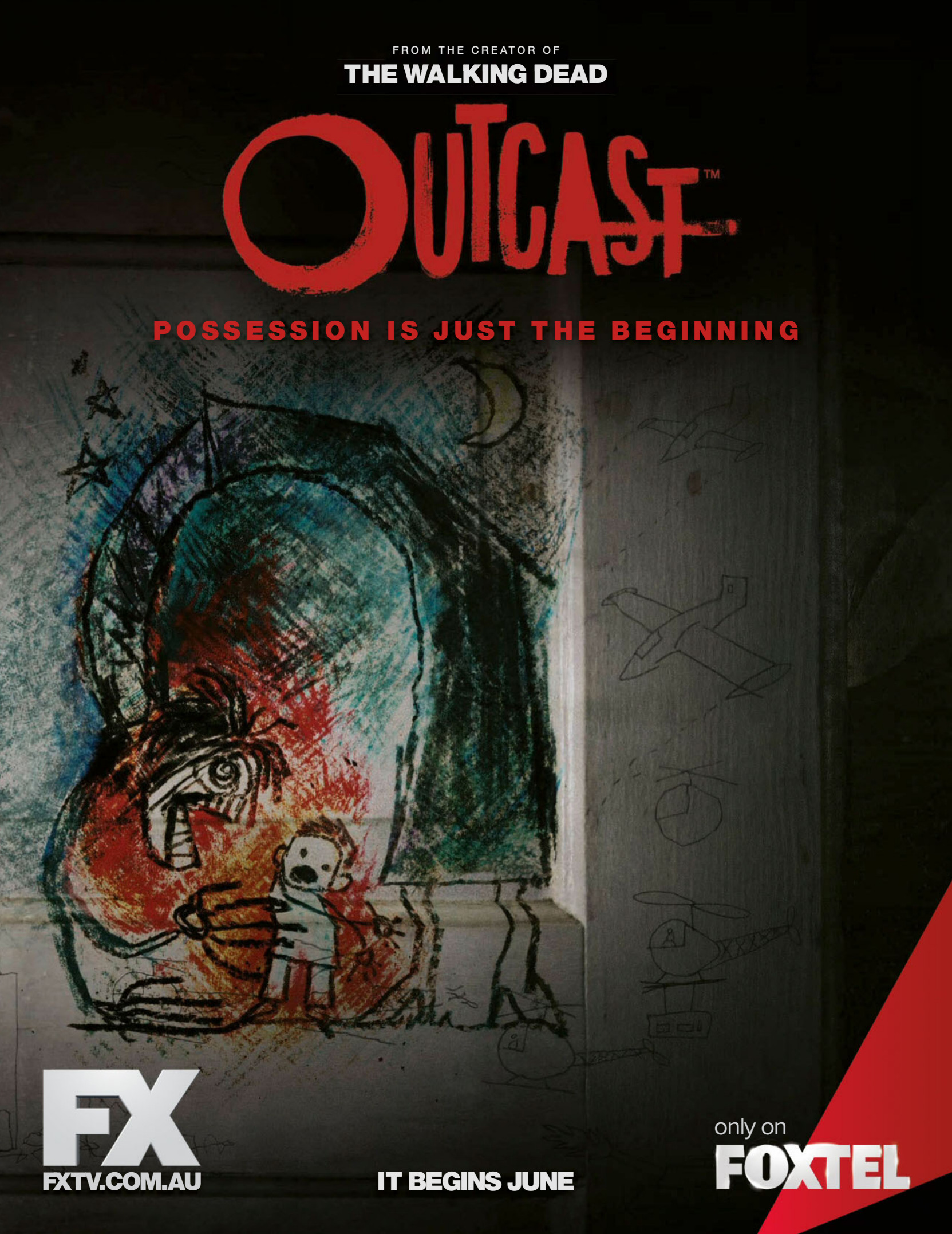
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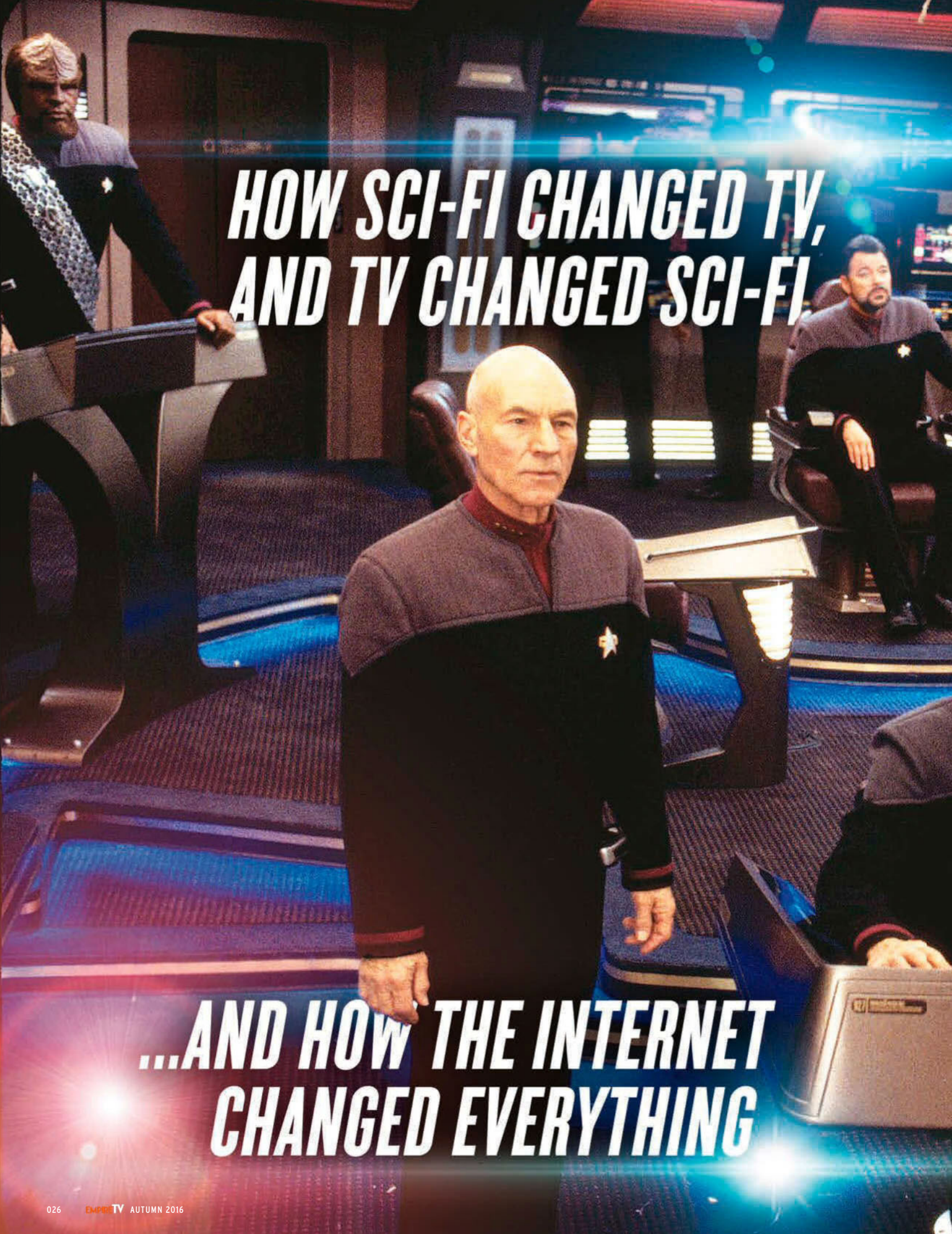
SHINING

MAN. LEATHER. CAR. HOFF.

SUCH A GREAT BIG MOON OF cheese is David Hasselhoff's career that his persona has taken on a life of its own, synonymous with a level of ludicrous kitsch best defined by shirtless melodrama *Baywatch*. After a slow start, as Boner in 1976's *Revenge Of The Cheerleaders*, he become this guy in 1982: Michael Knight, the snake-hipped crimefighter aided by a computer car, KITT. These days, the Hoff kevorka flexes pecs in the UK's *Hoff The Record*, playing a fictionalised version of himself. Perfect.

> BRYAN SINGER DEVELOPING R-RATED *RED SONJA* SERIES > JENNIFER BEALS LANDS *TAKEN* ROLE


FROM THE CREATOR OF
THE WALKING DEAD
OUTCAST™
POSSESSION IS JUST THE BEGINNING
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HOW SCI-FI CHANGED TV, AND TV CHANGED SCI-FI

...AND HOW THE INTERNET CHANGED EVERYTHING



SCIENCE FICTION AND GENRE STORYTELLING RULE THE SMALL SCREEN. HOW DID WE GET HERE? AND WHAT DOES THE FINAL FRONTIER LOOK LIKE? *EMPIRETV* BOLDLY GOES...

WORDS **OSCAR HILLERSTROM**

A LONG TIME AGO, IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY...

As it did in cinema, merchandising and census completion, *Star Wars* changed everything in TV. But the repercussions on the small screen took decades to get us here: a world where dragons and zombies rule the mainstream.

In 1977, *Star Wars*' popularity broke the mould as to what and how people watched movies. The 'blockbuster' was born, and stories aimed at kids, but enjoyable for everyone, redefined cinema. But *Star Wars* also had an impact on the kids who saw it. Thirty years later, they got into TV in a big way, and started calling the shots, with George Lucas's vision in their DNA.

Meanwhile, in the late '80s and '90s, sci-fi on TV took off, becoming part of the mainstream in a way it had never been before. Now 'genre' dominates dramatic, scripted TV. The early noughties saw the birth of the 'Golden Age' of TV — with the success of HBO's original gritty programming, led by *The Sopranos*. The world saw itself on TV through dark glasses, and this has now applied to sci-fi, creating a mesmerising blend of the fantastical and the grimly realistic.















WE HAVE TO GO BACK, MARTY!

When *Star Wars* came out, Hollywood tried to emulate its success with a new focus on special effects. *Battle Beyond The Stars* (1978), *Star Crash* ('78) and *The Black Hole* ('79) were the result. Sci-fi was still shackled by the opinion held by producers and executives that it was for kids, and thus the budgets and craft expected today did not apply. The results were poor to middling.

On TV, *Battlestar Galactica* (1978) delivered on the promise of *Star Wars* — for about a season. It was a gamble by (U.S.) ABC: at the time, one of the most expensive shows ever made ($1m per episode in 1978). Dwindling numbers saw dwindling budgets; a death spiral of cheap one-off movies featuring horrible special effects, writing and acting finished it off.

Of course, sci-fi and fantasy existed on TV and the movies before *Star Wars*. It always has: for kids. The serial that inspired George Lucas (and Steven Spielberg), *Flash Gordon* (1936), was an attempt to aim sci-fi at adults that failed and ended up the forerunner of Saturday morning cartoons. The biggest sci-fi shows of the '50s and '60s, like *Adventures Of Superman* ('52-'58), *The Jetsons* ('62-'87), *My Favourite Martian* ('63-'66), *Lost In Space* ('65-'68), *Thunderbirds* ('65-'66), *Land Of The Giants* ('68-'70), and *Doctor Who* ('63-'89), were aimed at kids. *The Twilight Zone* ('59-'64) and *Star Trek* ('66-'69) were rare moments where more family- or adult-oriented fare was successful.







In the 1970s US TV networks experimented with *The Planet Of The Apes* ('74) and *The Man From Atlantis* ('77-'78), and had a rare hit with *The Six Million Dollar Man* ('74-'78). *The Incredible Hulk* ('78-'82) proved to be a cultural icon, heading into adult territory, with a surprisingly large female audience.

















You know, for kids!
Page 28, left to right, from top left: *Flash Gordon* cinema serial; *Adventures Of Superman*; *The Jetsons*; *Lost In Space*; *My Favourite Martian*, *Land Of The Giants*; *Doctor Who*; *Thunderbirds*; *Star Trek*; *Buck Rogers In The 25th Century*; *The Twilight Zone*.

Page 29, left to right, from top left: *Planet Of The Apes* (TV show); *The Incredible Hulk*; *Man From Atlantis*; *The Six Million Dollar Man*; *V*; *Battlestar Galactica* (original; 1978); *Blake's 7*; *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*.

The '80s saw US sci-fi TV continue the theme of 'kids first, adults second' with *Buck Rogers In The 25th Century* ('79-'81), *Knight Rider* ('82-'86) and *V* ('84-'85). In the UK, *Doctor Who* was met with interesting variations: *Blake's 7* ('78-'81) and *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* ('81). Interesting, yes. Mainstream, no. That was yet to come.

TO BOLDLY GO

Gene Roddenberry spent much of the 1970s trying to get *Star Trek* back on the air. A growing fanbase created by the show's reruns had created enough groundswell for the show to head towards a comeback. 1978 was the year that *Star Trek*: Phase II was set to air.

Star Wars' impact changed the proposed pilot episode into *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* ('79). It misfired, but *Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan* ('82) breathed new life into the movie franchise, and so Phase II finally made it, in a roundabout way, with an all new crew, set a hundred years after Kirk and co, as *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987). It was a massive success, airing from 1987 through to 1994, spinning off *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* ('93-'99), *Star Trek: Voyager* ('95-'01) and *Star Trek: Enterprise* ('01-'05). *Star Trek:TNG* is the only syndicated show to ever have been nominated for an Emmy for Best Dramatic Series. It won a Peabody Award, and in total, collected 18 Emmys.

Episode costs of $1 million in the first season rose to $2 million in later years, but the show was in the black by the end of its first season, and became incredibly profitable for Paramount, to the tune of around $90m per season. The success of *Star Trek* legitimised 'big S' sci-fi in the minds of audiences and TV execs alike. After a decade, its influence was felt within a broad range of shows, as the writers and producers of *Star Trek* went on to inspire or directly create the Golden Age of genre TV that we currently enjoy. Genre TV was placed on a spectrum that was always included with *Star Trek*.

Ron Moore began his career on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, went on to rewrite sci-fi with the reboot of *Battlestar Galactica* (2004) and currently runs *Helix* and *Outlander*. In a 2014 interview with *Fast Company*, he said, "The biggest change is that sci-fi is just more accepted. When we were doing *Next Generation*, we were the only game in town. And we were syndicated. There was really nothing on broadcast network TV remotely considered genre."

In the early '90s, network executives took gambles, and they paid off, with shows like *The X-Files* ('93-'02), *Babylon 5* ('94-'98), *Sliders* ('95-'00), *Third Rock From The Sun* ('96-'01), *Stargate* ('97-'07) and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* ('97-'03), redefining what hit shows could be on mainstream network TV. With exposure to so much genre, 'mainstream' and 'genre' audiences intermingled. Big ideas told boldly could find a home where fantasy softened the blow. One of the first lesbian kisses on network TV, for example, was on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*.

At the same time, the conventions of the sci-fi world were also being challenge. Ron Moore again, talking about his time in the *Star Trek* world: "There was great resistance on every level to make it more serialised. They didn't even like two-part ›

episodes. *Star Trek* never embraced serialisation, except the last couple of years on *Deep Space Nine*, because the syndicator stopped caring. They said, 'The inmates have taken over, let them do what they want.' But shows like *Lost* and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* showed producers and networks that people had an appetite for this kind of programming. So now you can pitch this type of material, whereas before they wouldn't even take the meeting."

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Like many of their filmmaking contemporaries, *Star Wars* inspired Joss Whedon and J.J. Abrams. Whedon was 12 when *Star Wars* came out. J.J. Abrams was 11. When they were hitting their screenwriting/show-running stride, the television networks were now ready for bolder ideas. *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* ('97-'03) and *Alias* ('01-'06), for example, placed strong female leads in a successful genre show. These successes meant some incredibly bold moves, like *Firefly* (2002), and incredibly successful ones, like *Lost* (2004), inspiring creators and fans alike.

The now broad use of tried and trusted tropes of mainstream TV. like serialisation (the continuing story that keeps you hooked) in genre TV, changed everything. The big 'what if' of genre, combined with psychologically sophisticated characters and the hook of 'what happens next?' is the basic formula that works successfully today.

Ron Moore and David Eick combined hard sci-fi with compelling storytelling and dark plotlines in 2003 with the mini-series of *Battlestar Galactica* ('04-'09). The darkness that had began at HBO with *Oz* and *The Sopranos* had made its way into space, and a new kind of ultra-fan was born, matched only by people who corner you at parties and ask if you've seen *The Wire*.

Now in the teens, we have a TV landscape dominated by *Game Of Thrones* and *The Walking Dead*, and shows like *Jessica Jones* emerged ahead of a vast pack of TV that blends darkness and fantasy to varying degrees. The sci-fi that used to be in the corners of screen culture is now part of a broad spectrum that has incorporated it, replicated it and improved it. A good sense of how far audiences have come: when George R.R. Martin's *A Song Of Ice And Fire* was originally pitched for the screen, it was going to be a PG-13 movie. Now it's a $60 million per season behemoth that kids shouldn't be allowed to watch. *The Walking Dead* is an adult TV show, based on a comic book, about zombies, on a major US TV network, syndicated all over the world.

Good TV is good TV — doesn't matter what it's about, or where it's set. A meth lab in Albuquerque, an advertising agency in the '60s, on a planet that takes years to go around its sun — as long as the story is compelling, the characters relatable, it's all the same.

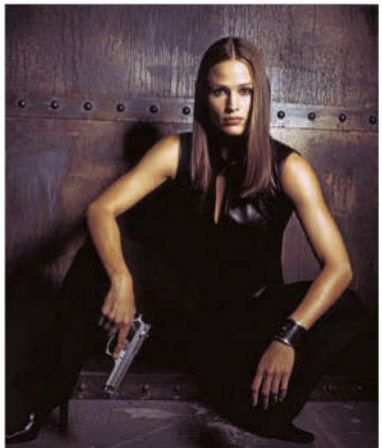












You know, for everyone! Clockwise from top: *Lost*; "One the first first lesbian kisses on network TV" from *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*; *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*; *Alias*; *Firefly*; *Battlestar Galactica* (redux, 2004).





Who'd have thunk these two shows – *The Walking Dead* and *Game Of Thrones* – would be the dominant form of TV drama in 2016? Yay for us.

FUTURE'S END

But what of the future of TV? Does it have one? What does 'TV' even mean anymore? In 1983, the finale of *M*A*S*H* had 105.9 million viewers in the U.S.. The biggest hit in the world right now, *The Big Bang Theory*, has around 21 million viewers watching it on a TV. *The Walking Dead* isn't too far behind with 19.9 million viewers. *Game Of Thrones* averages around 5.9 million viewers per episode. In the U.S., TV audiences have steadily dwindled in the past 15 years. To put the current figures into perspective, Joss Whedon's *Firefly* averaged 4.7 million viewers in 2002 when it was cancelled by Fox. Clearly, TV on TV is no longer a thing for people who watch whatever they want, whenever they want, on laptop, PC, tablet or phone.

No one will ever watch as much TV (on TV) as they did in the '80s. But we are now watching more TV off TV than ever before. The figures would suggest we might have already passed the '80s and be heading into uncharted territory. TruOptik, the Connecticut company that tracks the way people consume media worldwide, and the source people quote when talking about illegal downloads of *Game Of Thrones* in Australia, had the finale of *Game Of Thrones* S5 at 13.4 million downloads in Australia alone. The top-rated 'regular' TV show on free-to-air TV in Australia, *The Voice*, had 1.4 million viewers in July of 2015.

The major conundrum for TV producers of the modern world — how to turn audiences into revenue, when the old models are crumbling. If you can't stop people from illegally downloading TV shows, how do you make enough money to continue making them?

If anyone knows how to make money from the current situation, CEO Andre Swanston of TruOptik does, and he sees product placement as the answer for 'right here, right now'. "Just by accurately measuring and segmenting TV content consumed illegally in Australia, there is tens of millions of dollars of value that can be unlocked. One of the ways advertisers are leveraging these views are within show brand/product placement. If a 25-year-old male watches his favourite character in a TV show drink Coca-Cola, that is just as effective messaging, if not better, than him watching a commercial. If content owners can increase the size of their measured audiences in markets like Australia by 30 to 100 per cent, that brand placement holds even more value."

So, product placement is the way to go, for now. What does the future hold? Producer Enzo Tedeschi, digital distribution pioneer with *The Tunnel* (2011) and *Airlock* (2015), says: "The fact is, nobody knows, and that means we *have* to be experimenting. Between free/subscription models and new tech, we cannot keep up with the tech of designing and testing new monetisation models! One idea is to be the seeder/leakers to sites like Primewire, where you get paid as the uploader of the original material — in a sense, 'pirating' yourself."

Shane Abbess, director of *Gabriel* (2007) and the multiplatform-released *Infini* (2015) (which briefly out-charted *Interstellar* on iTunes) is now into another local sci-fi project, *SFv1*, starring Rachel Griffiths, Kellan Lutz and Temuera Morrison, set in a time of interstellar colonisation. When it comes to expanding local sci-fi: "I think we need to start it, firstly. As long as it's interesting and holds the high production value standards as the world is coming to expect."

When it comes to TV tropes, the line between sci-fi and 'mainstream' has not only been crossed, it's completely gone. "I feel like it's all becoming mainstream right now. Television is where cinema was in the mid-'90s. Blue sky all around. Everyone in Hollywood now is more interested in turning their stories to television rather than cinema.

"With the midsection [*$15-50m films*] of the marketplace becoming extinct, cinema will be reserved for the tentpoles and television already is where the midsection now exists. Under $5m stories will be the fuel and inspiration of the burgeoning VOD market — until piracy cripples that even more. Then it'll be tentpole cinema, amazing television and the arthouse world of low budget indies and interesting genre pics."

And then there's the money: how is it all going to be sustainable? Will the numbers on the internet mean that creators will find enough paying viewers?

Says Shane, "I think the Netflix model is the only way, where people pay a monthly fee and get everything they want. After a while, such a monopoly will force something else to exist but right now piracy has crippled the movie industry the same way it did the music industry. It will never come back. So we need to accept that things like subscription television and commercial funded media is where we're forced to go. Adapt or die."

WOW, I DID NOT KNOW THAT

→ Donald E. Westlake (*Payback*/*The Hot Rock*) co-created 1979's *SuperTrain*, a flop so expensive it threatened to *cough* derail NBC completely.

→ *Battlestar Galactica* (the original) cost $1m an episode (in 1977 money). In 2004, that would have been around $3 million – a million more than the Ron Moore/David Eick remake cost per episode.

→ *Get Smart* co-creator Buck Henry created *Quark*, about an intergalactic garbage collector. It lasted eight whole episodes.

TOMORROW IS YESTERDAY

As *Star Wars* returned to the big screens in 2015, and a new batch of genre shows emerged in 2016, it's a good time to ponder what the future will bring. The power of the internet means the hope that more people than ever will be able to find economically sound niches of creative expression. The possibility of bigger budgets combined with incredible ideas, as a mechanism that will return an investment in those ideas, emerges and points to a bright future for creators and viewers alike.

It will be the next decade that determines what we will see, and then, a future of 'TV' created by those inspired by *The Walking Dead* and *Game Of Thrones* will be upon us. ETV

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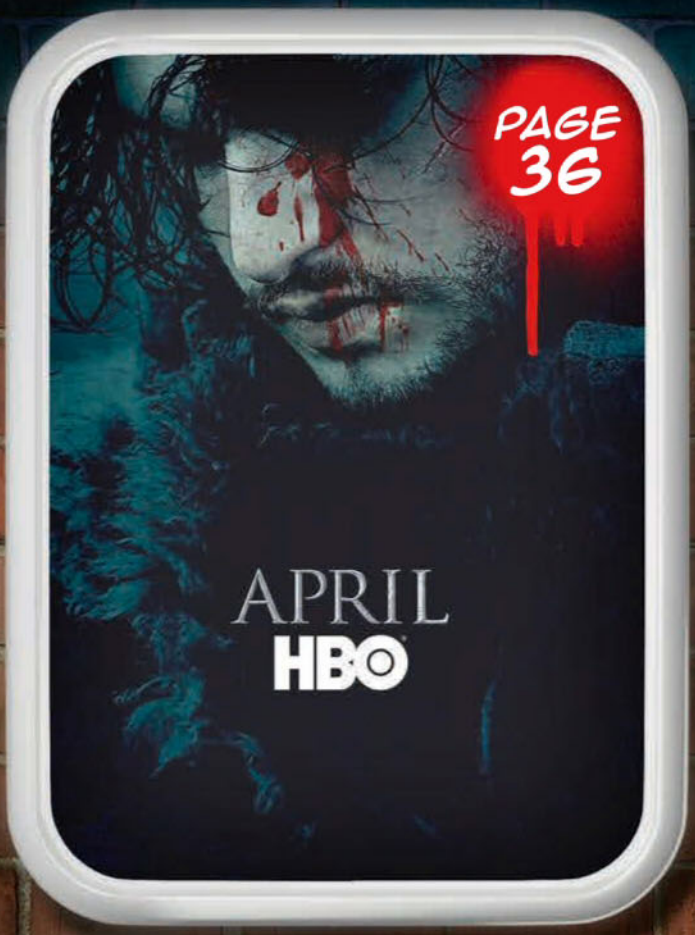
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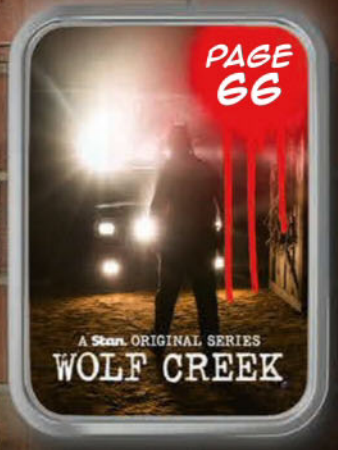
COMING SOON













BEHOLD AN AUTUMN WHERE AUSTRALIA JOINS IN THE GENRE TV REVOLUTION WITH WOLF CREEK, CLEVERMAN AND TOMORROW WHEN THE WAR BEGAN. WHERE FEAR THE WALKING DEAD TAKES TO THE WATER, AND THE PEOPLE OF WESTEROS PREPARE FOR THE COMING OF WINTER... AGAIN. TURN OVER FOR GAME OF THRONES S6



GAME OF THRONES SPECIAL / PART I

You Know Nothing

The sixth season of *Game Of Thrones* takes us into uncharted territory: we're going beyond the books now...

WORDS **NICK DE SEMLYEN**



There are a few unwritten rules when it comes to the denizens of Westeros.

Think twice before entering a place called the House Of The Undying. If you receive a wedding invite, politely RSVP with an, "I'd love to, but I just booked a holiday to Skagos in the Shivering Sea." And perhaps most crucial of all: never, ever, *ever* interrupt a Bolton.

EmpireTV is across a table from not one but two of them. Namely Roose (Michael McElhatton), the treacherous snake who stabbed Robb Stark in the heart; plus his bastard son, icy-eyed sadist Ramsay (Iwan Rheon), who since his debut in *Game Of Thrones*' third season has trained dogs to rip innocent young girls to shreds, and chopped off a man's penis before sending it to his family. McElhatton and Rheon are, we're sure, perfectly nice blokes, but it's hard to dispel the feeling that one wrong question could result in a rigorous flaying.

And then, just as Rheon is getting into full flow about his character's sociopathic tendencies, the iPhone he's placed on the table starts to vibrate. Silence descends, as two Bolton heads swivel to regard the offending item with displeasure.

"It's Theon," deadpans McElhatton.

"REEK?" bellows Rheon, lifting the phone to his ear and pretending to take the call. "GET YOUR ARSE BACK TO WINTERFELL!" His feigned menace melts into a look of genuine worry. "Hope I didn't actually answer that..."

If *Game Of Thrones* is TV's biggest chessboard, loaded with dozens of characters plotting sophisticated attacks on each other, then the end of Season 5 saw a mass scattering of the pieces, as if a cat had leapt onto it, swatting wildly with its paws at kings, bishops and pawns alike. The cruel hand of fate (otherwise known as showrunners David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, in league with novelist George R.R. Martin) struck some we love, like Jon Snow (Kit Harington), who was stabbed by six members of his brotherhood, the Night's Watch; and Daenerys (Emilia Clarke), whose slow but steady climb to power was scuppered by an assassination attempt, leaving her new advisor, Tyrion (Peter Dinklage), in the middle of the carnage, and landing her — via a dragon-ride — once again in the hands of the barbaric Dothraki. Which is something of a Khal-amity, as, assuming the show stays true to the books, these are the followers of the Khaleesi's prime rival, Khal Jhaqo.

Even the villainous Boltons have suffered a major setback. Sansa (Sophie Turner) and Theon (Alfie Allen), aka the hideously tortured 'Reek' — previous owner of the aforementioned lopped-off manhood — were last seen leaping from the walls of Winterfell, finally defying their captors. Roose and Ramsay, we can confirm, are pissed. "We've lost a woman who can bear a new heir and make an alliance between the Starks and the Boltons to Winterfell," says McElhatton. "It's a major error." Adds Rheon: "Sansa is a huge blow. As for Theon, that's less important, but Ramsay is gutted he's lost his little servant. He'll miss Theon. Or what's left of him."

Meanwhile, in King's Landing, the awful Cersei (Lena Headey) has been publicly humiliated and is facing trial, while prayer-chanting nut-nuts have taken over the capital. "I started out by basing my character on Pope Francis," says Jonathan Pryce, who plays the show's latest power-grabber, the High Sparrow. "A man of the people, who walks barefoot and administers to the poor. But he's really a religious zealot: homophobic, extremely right-wing, a man who dishes out punishments in a quite violent and aggressive way. You're going to see some more of that."

Pressed for more information, Pryce clams up. "I think the musical numbers





Above: Maisie Williams's Arya Stark must learn to cope with blindness. **Here:** "Have *you* got my penis?" Alfie Allen's Theon with Sophie Turner's Sansa.



Gwendoline Christie returns as Brienne. **Below:** Isaac Hempstead-Wright's Bran is back, heading on *Inception*-like journeys with the Three-Eyed Raven (Max von Sydow).





Will Melisandre (Carice van Houten) revive Jon Snow? **Below:** Emilia Clarke's Daenerys faces the Dothraki.



are going to be a big surprise," he smiles. "I'll be doing some show tunes: the High Sparrow's greatest hits…"

IF THE CAST ARE EVEN

more evasive about plot details now than they were in previous years, it's because this season *Game Of Thrones* will be, literally, off-the-books. Although the TV show has increasingly deviated from the details of George R.R. Martin's colossal volumes, it still loosely followed their arc. Now, in most of its plotlines, it is overtaking the last book published, 2011's *A Dance With Dragons*, and with the next one, *The Winds Of Winter*, still being written by Martin, we've crossed the proverbial Wall and are heading into wild, uncharted lands. If the warnings issued by the cast are anything to go by, here be things worse than dragons.

"It's a bit scary for the actors," says Peter Dinklage. "Everyone before this knew when they were going to perish. Sean Bean knew he was going to die in Season 1. Richard Madden knew he was going to die in Season 3. But now literally no-one knows. Dave and Dan hold our future in their hands."

In 2013, the two showrunners flew to Santa Fe, New Mexico, to visit Martin. There, the author removed his trademark Greek fisherman's cap, took a deep breath, and told them the ending of the saga. And in case you're wondering how epic it gets, the meeting took a *week*.

So Benioff and Weiss are two of the very few who know what lies at the end of the road. "We have some wild upcoming scenes based on inside information George gave us, and we have some other wild scenes that won't be in the books," they tell *EmpireTV* via a joint email. "George is the sole master of the books, from which the series sprang, so his creative influence is everywhere. But he's in Santa Fe writing the books and we're in Belfast making the show. If we've joined the Night's Watch, he's stuck in the Citadel. He's built the damn place, and now they've gone and locked him in."

At the very least, this new era of uncertainty means even *Game Of Thrones* über-fans (Throneheads? Night's Watchers? Masochists?) can have some hope that, against the odds, the good guys — what's left of them — will make it through. As a favourite character of both the audience and Martin himself, Tyrion is one of the least likely to check out this season, though his position is perilous and he's certainly suffering. "He's the same old survivor but I don't ›









think he finds the world as joyful as he did before," Dinklage tells *EmpireTV*. "He has a lot of mistrust in his heart now, though he is trying to find that joy again. I think that's really interesting to play. And working with my friend Conleth Hill, who plays Varys, is so much fun. We were back together at the end of Season 5 but I got to do a lot of good stuff with him [*in Season 6*]."

On the Stark side of things, while Sansa is now free from the abusive captivity she's suffered at the hands of monstrous suitors (Tyrion excepted) since her father's execution, her siblings, Arya and Bran, are undergoing very different types of training, each with a supernatural tinge. The former, being tutored in the art of assassination in Braavos' House Of Black And White, is being pushed to new lows while testing her own physical limits.

"There are some points this year that get really, really dark and sad for Arya," says Maisie Williams. "It was the first time reading the scripts where I was like, 'Oh, she's struggling.' But it's an incredible season. Despite having been blinded, Arya gets very physical and does a lot of stunts. I had a separate set of contact lenses with peep-holes in, so nobody got hurt, but there were a few close calls where I nearly smacked some people in the head."

As for Bran, after not appearing at all in Season 5, he's back in a crucial story strand, one that's more than a little out-there. Having traversed the wilds and escaped a cadre of malevolent wights, he and Meera found themselves in what Isaac Hempstead-Wright describes as a "strange wizard cave place". We pick things up with the duo encountering the Three-Eyed Raven (Max von Sydow), otherwise known as Mr. Tree, an ancient, magical being, and the last 'greenseer'.

"He's a thousand-year-old, wise sage," explains Hempstead-Wright, "who has become one with the roots of the weirwood tree. Those trees hold a special power of being connected with the past, present and future." Which explains how, this season, the ill-fated Ned Stark will, in a sense, return: 13-year-old actor Sebastian Croft has been cast as a younger version of the Sean Bean-portrayed character (a Bean-sprout, if you will) to appear in Bran-witnessed flashbacks.

"Bran and the Three-Eyed Raven both go on these shared visions into dream worlds — I like to frame it as *Inception* — with the Three-Eyed Raven explaining to Bran exactly what is happening," Hempstead-Wright continues. "And some very exciting things are unleashed that haven't been in the books."

AS THE YOUNGER

Starks' powers develop, their stepbrother lies on the ground at Castle Black, his life-blood seeping away. It's the biggest question going into Season 6: is this really the end for Jon Snow? Despite the fact

Clockwise from left: A post-penance Cersei (Lena Headey) sports a new shorter hairdo; King Tommen (Dean-Charles Chapman) and Jaime (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) grieve for Nell Tiger Free's Myrcella; Varys (Conleth Hill) with Tyrion (Peter Dinklage), faced with soothing a city in turmoil.



Iwan Rheon as the ultra-cold (not least literally) Ramsay Bolton.

that Kit Harington was spotted on set in September, luxurious locks intact, the stars are giving away nothing — if there is anything to be given away.

"He's dead… Everyone has to get used to it," Harington has insisted. Which has hardly quelled fans' tears and tantrums (seriously, go to YouTube and check out 'Jon Snow Death Reaction Compilation'). As for the show's overlords, Benioff and Weiss have taken a fiendish amount of enjoyment in teasing viewers, issuing a poster with the character's face covered in blood, and responding to *EmpireTV*'s attempt to ferret out intel with a riff on Harington's hair: "Have you ever seen it up close? It's so luxuriant and fragrant. Like a mink in heat… Sorry, what was the question?"

Number-one fan theory: he'll be resurrected by flame-haired sorceress Melisandre (Carice van Houten), who is conveniently located at the Wall. The actress bats this away with the speed of someone who's been asked about it 30 times since breakfast. "I'm afraid I'm gonna disappoint a lot of people," she shrugs, tucking into a banana in an un-sorceressy way. "But why so much pressure on my character? I mean, I understand that he's the good we want in this crazy world. And me and my mother and my sister want him to come back very desperately. But Melisandre has never brought anyone back to life. Why does it have to be me?"

Number-two fan theory: a new character, played by Ian McShane, will be the one to pull Snow from the ice. This is based on his provocative comment at a recent film festival: "I am responsible for bringing somebody back that you think you're never going to see again." Then again, he could be talking about The Hound (Rory McCann) or Catelyn Stark (Michelle Fairley) or, hell, Theon's penis.

It's futile to guess what's coming (except winter — that's a cert). But there are two things you can safely assume. ›

EMPIRETV HOT SHOWS 2016 COMING SOON

HOW NOT TO LOSE YOUR HEAD

WITH SEASON 6 SET TO BE THE BLOODIEST YET, WE ASKED THE CAST FOR TIPS ON SURVIVING WESTEROS...



ALFIE ALLEN

(Theon Greyjoy)

"Keep your head down, and your cock hidden."



DEAN-CHARLES CHAPMAN

(Tommen Lannister)

"Don't be a Lannister. Or a Stark. Or a Snow."



JONATHAN PRYCE

(High Sparrow)

"Be nice to the writers. Plead with them to keep you alive for just one more season, so you can have a bit of money to retire."



MAISIE WILLIAMS

(Arya Stark)

"Don't be in it for power. That's bad news. So many characters have started with the best intentions and end up in trouble."



IWAN RHEON

(Ramsay Bolton)

"Be ruthless."



JOHN BRADLEY

(Samwell Tarly)

"Find some dragonglass."



LIAM CUNNINGHAM

(Davos Seaworth)

"Don't make eye contact with the producers. Don't go for dinner with them. Because anything can happen. You put a deposit down on a Ferrari then you're dead."



MICHAEL McELHATTON

(Roose Bolton)

"Being nice and good doesn't help. Power is might. If I'm more powerful than you, I'll take what you have. Nice guys finish last."



ISAAC HEMPSTEAD-WRIGHT

(Bran Stark)

"Getting in a cave and staying there is a pretty good survival method."



PETER DINKLAGE

(Tyrion Lannister)

"You've just got to keep Dave [*Benioff*] and Dan [*Weiss*] in their good graces. Wine and dine them, really."



First, *Game Of Thrones* is getting bigger. This year saw around 250 shooting days, with 50 per cent more footage than was shot for Season 5. "Across many departments, the complexity has increased significantly: visual effects, prosthetics, make-up, horses, you name it," say Benioff/Weiss. Thousands of extras took part in scenes filmed in Girona, Spain. Even the dragons have doubled in size: the scaly buggers now measure 60 metres from wingtip to wingtip.

Second, *Game Of Thrones* is getting even more brutal — if that were possible. There are battles to be waged, unholy creatures to be faced, sins of the past to be avenged. And those fearsome, treacherous Boltons will be dealing out more than their fair share of the bloodletting. "Oh yes," confirms Rheon, grey eyes flashing. "There's always room for improvement."

***GAME OF THRONES:* SEASON 6 IS ON SHOWCASE FROM 11AM MONDAY, APRIL 25.**



Above: Balon Greyjoy (Patrick Malahide) 'welcomes' a guest to his hearth.
Left: One of the last decent men, Davos Seaworth (Liam Cunningham) returns for Season 6.

REIGN IN SPAIN

WHILE SEASON 5 OF *GAME OF THRONES* WAS SHOT IN southern Seville, Season 6 takes fans mostly toward the eastern coast of Spain. Most locations were shot within five hours of a drive from Barcelona. If you'd like to spend Spain in a Westeros way, here is a tour of the hottest spots to slay, er, stay.

WORDS **CYNTHIA WANG**



1 Girona

LOCATION: Catalonia, far northeastern part of Spain (100km from Barcelona)
DOUBLES AS: Braavos and King's Landing
POINTS OF INTEREST: 12th Century preserved Jewish Quarter, which will serve as parts of King's Landing; the Cathedral, from where the Tyrells will battle the Sparrow and the Faith Militant; and the narrow winding cobblestone steps through Sant Marti and Claveria Street, which will transport you to Braavos.
GEEKY COOL: Ice cream parlour Rocanbolesc has made an ice cream shaped as Jaimie Lanister's golden hand.
WEBSITE: http://www.girona.cat/turisme/eng/

2 Castell de Santa Florentina

LOCATION: Near Canet de Mar, Catalonia, an hour drive south of Girona
DOUBLES AS: Horn Hill, the stronghold of the Tully family
POINTS OF INTEREST: Drive an hour south from Girona and you arrive at St. Florentina's castle, an 11th Century medieval Roman fort built to defend the area from those seeking its wines and the goods of its rich inhabitants. Now you can 'see' where Sam Tarly got cast out by his dad Randyll.
GEEKY COOL: If you're ever tying the knot, you can rent it out for weddings.
WEBSITE: http://castelldesantaflorentina.com

3 Bardenas Reales

LOCATION: A four-and-a-half-hour drive west of Canet de Mar and Barcelona, it's a semi-desert region filled with eroded clay and sandstone canyons
DOUBLES AS: Dothraki campgrounds
POINTS OF INTEREST: The Bardenas Reales National Park, 70km from the Pyrenees Mountains, and several bullrings in the Ribera.
GEEKY COOL: Walk among the ruins of the Rada settlement in the middle of the park. They had defended the Kingdom of Navarre, which was conquered by Castille in the early 16th Century.
WEBSITE: http://www.bardenasreales.es/turismo_eng_1v.htm

4 Castillo de Zafra

LOCATION: A three-hour drive due south of the Bardenas in Campillo de Deunas, Guadalajara
DOUBLES AS: Tower Of Joy
POINTS OF INTEREST: The late 12th Century Visigothic and Moorish sandstone castle sits on a vast rock outcropping and was restored by its private owner in the 20th Century. It serves in Season 6 as the Tower Of Joy, most likely in flashback scenes by way of Bran Stark to trace what happened between Ned and his sister Lyanne back when Ned fought the kingsguard.
GEEKY COOL: If you want to tour the castle, you'll have to ask the owner's permission, and then access it by climbing a ladder.
WEBSITE: http://www.castles.nl/zafra-castle

5 Peñíscola

LOCATION: Drive back east, about four hours, to the seaside community of Peñíscola, Castellón
DOUBLES AS: Mereen
POINTS OF INTEREST: Plaza de Armas, a white fort overlooking the sea, and Plaza de Santa Maria, the walled part of the city, all are preserved medaeval city locations with Portal Fosc, a gate to the city from the 16th Century.
GEEKY COOL: Doubles as a tour of filming sites for *Ben-Hur*, which also made use of the city's main castle.
WEBSITE: http://www.catalonia-valencia.com/peniscola-spain-travel-guide.html

6 Almería

LOCATION: Drive straight south along the eastern coast of Spain for close to six hours (which sounds like a fun drive regardless) to reach Almería in Andalucía
DOUBLES AS: Dorne, more Dothraki camps
POINTS OF INTEREST: The Mesa Roldan lookout tower and the gardens and fountains of Alcazaba of Almería.
GEEKY COOL: Cast and crew took in a number of restaurants in town, so look for their photos in La Encina, the Carmen Guillemot and La Burana
WEBSITE: http://www.unique-almeria.com



SPOILER ALERT (MAYBE)

Praying For Snow

After a Summer of intense speculation, Winter is finally coming. It *should* contain the most anticipated plot move in *Game Of Thrones* history: the resurrection of Jon Snow. It needs to, dammit... WORDS IAN NATHAN

IN MARCH 2006, WHEN showrunners David Benioff and D.B. Weiss first sought George R.R. Martin's blessing to transform *A Game Of Thrones* and its best-selling sequels into an HBO series, the author tested their worthiness with a question. Who did they think the mother of Jon Snow might be? Given the subsequent television phenomenon, we can take it they were in the ballpark.

Yet this very question points to why we face Season 6 with a hitherto unknown sensation — doubt. Season 5 ended in high drama. Snow, the mysterious bastard son of Ned Stark, lord commander of the Night's Watch, genuinely decent cove amid a multitude of venal swamp-rats, was seen toppling into the snow, stabbed by his own men, the most outrageous victim of the show's custom of slaughtering its beloved.

The intervening months have been filled with fevered speculation that rumours of his death have been greatly exaggerated. Or was, at least, only temporary. The most widespread theory being the Mellisandre Sanction. Did you spot the Red Sorceress's uncanny arrival at Castle Black just before Snow bit the snow? Buried in the Martinian mythology there is the prophecy of Azor Ahai, the prince who will be reborn to save the Seven Kingdoms from the White Walkers. Mellisandre may deduce that Snow is her prince. Although, if he does get resurrected, how alive will he be? We've already witnessed that not-all-there quality of Beric Dondarion. Who wants Snow as a hollow man? Notably, the series has, thus far, sidestepped the return of Catelyn Stark as the malevolent Lady Stoneheart, her throat still severed, picking off dastardly Freys one by one.

Frankly, we're knee deep in Snow-will-show theories. He might not be dead at all because his eyes went purple, so his soul was transplanted into his Direwolf Ghost. Or, perchance, the White Walkers will do their zingy fresh zombie thing on him. Or Bran will use his warg abilities to remote control Snow.

The career of Kit Harrington, who so ably filled Snow's boots, is showing little sign of moving on in earnest (*Pompeii*? *Spooks: The* Not That *Greater Good*?). Besides, hadn't there been an announcement that he had signed on for seven seasons? He was papped at Wimbledon still in possession of Snow's luxuriant curls. Then he was spotted in Belfast as Season 6 was being shot.

Pestered for a prognosis, Harrington has managed to be simultaneously emphatic and circumspect. "I'm definitely not in the new series," he stated, claiming he had been on set to fill in as his own corpse. But eagle-eyed Snow whisperers have caught a glimpse of him on horseback in the trailer. Which could mean a flashback or a vision emanating from Bran's third eye. He finished with more upbeat news: "I know how long I'm a corpse for, but I can't tell you that!" So, it's less a matter of if than when he

returns from the grave. Will S6 conclude by doing the opposite of S5?

For HBO, such guesswork could prove double-edged. The publicity is great, but what if he really is an ex-Snow? Won't it fall awfully flat if all our speculation comes to naught? Indeed, the question of how he might return is of less importance than the fact that he *needs* to come back. While the show's unforgiving realism is to be admired, is *EmpireTV* alone in worrying that we're really not getting anywhere? Readers of the books know the sensation well — that the narrative is caught in an eternal holding pattern. As the saga is inflated with ever more characters and storylines, entropy has set in. Has all our investment in Snow been wiped away because that is the cruel nature of the universe, so get over it?

Game Of Thrones isn't life. The underlying conventions of storytelling remain vital if it's to come to a satisfying conclusion. Who remembers *Lost* without wincing? The show's genius lies in how it dances around conventions, not in dispensing with them. Martin has gone on record that he was writing a cross-generational saga centered on a quintet of characters who would see us through to the bitter end: Daenerys, Arya, Tyrion, Bran, and, yup, Jon Snow (watch your back, Sansa). Sure, he's allowed to change his mind, but literally to what end?

Which brings us back to that Litmus Test laid before Benioff and Weiss. Snow's arc is far from complete, not something that was true of The Red Viper or Robb. Their deaths were violent thrusts of forward motion whereas Snow's fate was like falling off a cliff. The pivotal matter of his parentage still lies unresolved.

Let's not get bogged down with another set of theories (Google will enlighten you), but hone in on the favourite. Uber-fans assure us that the Thrones endgame hinges on the R+L=J theory. In a nutshell, Rhaegar Targaryen and Lyanna Stark (Ned's sister) are, in fact, Snow's olds. So he has Targaryen blood and is free to get it on with Daenerys and save the world using dragon fire. There is a motherlode of evidence to back this up, apparently.

Ultimately, no other character in the saga — not Ned, not Robb, not the Hound — has afforded this much concern. Snow's death felt seismic. He is one of the constituent elements of *Game Of Thrones*. How could it possibly be the same experience without him? Maybe it shouldn't be spoilers Benioff and Weiss worry about, but the potential for spoiling their own show. Winter is coming. This must mean more Snow. ETV



"SPRECHEN SIE DOTHRAKI?"

INSIDE THE NOVEL LANGUAGES OF *GAME OF THRONES* WITH THEIR CREATOR, DAVID J. PETERSON

IN 2009, LANGUAGE CREATOR DAVID J. PETERSON FIRST introduced the world to spoken Dothraki and variants of Valyrian in *Game Of Thrones*. Since then, Peterson, 35, has brought to life the tongue of the Dark Elves in *Thor: The Dark World* and has developed Castithan, Iranthient and Omec languages for SyFy's *Defiance*.

But languages evolve, and so it was with Dothraki, the adopted language of Khaleesi Daenerys Targaryen, for which Peterson had already built a lexicon of more than 4000 words. "It was a lot of fun to come back and actually translate into it again," Peterson says, "not just for a fan request here or there, but some real, meaty translation."

How meaty? Consider the 25-second long Targaryen Battle Banner teaser for Season 6, in which a forboding and deep voice says: "*Yer vosak.* [You are nobody.] *Yol rek ma hake som yeri.* [The millionth of your name.] *Khaleesi vosi.* [Queen of nothing.]"

"That teaser was great because it's kind of ominous and portentious and yet fans have no idea of what's coming," Peterson says with a laugh. "Once I actually got to see the scripts and see what happens with that storyline, it was tremendously exciting from the standpoint of a language creator in that the bulk of all that material was going to be exclusively in Dothraki, but also because of what happens and the kind of tension that arises."

There is so much Dothraki to explore, in fact, that Peterson had to add "several dozen" new words to the language. "There's a lot of interesting stuff in this season," Peterson says, "a lot of really interesting grammatical constructions because of the types of conversations going on and a lot of new vocabulary that range from kind of prosaic to interesting and potentially spoiler-y. I think especially those that followed Dothraki early on and have followed it will be really satisfied and fascinated by what's coming."

The labour will be apparent right off the bat to the viewer's ears. "Working on any show, an average episode will have between five and eight lines translated," Peterson says. "A heavy episode will have 20. For Season 6, there was at least one episode that had more than 80 lines that I had to translate."

Yet it's not up to Peterson if those watching will get to understand fully what is being said. "There were some extended insults in this coming season that I have no idea if they're going to be subtitled or not," Peterson admits. "I just translate the stuff. It's up to them what will be part of the main thing and what isn't. So I've been really curious to see what's going to happen whenever that comes up."

> **"Languages base their put-downs on sex, excrement..."**

Speaking of which, what goes into the making of the right riposte? Peterson says most languages base their put-downs in sex, excrement, bodily functions, religion and family ties. "You would be surprised how often a word like 'step-brother' would be an insult in a language," Peterson says, adding that in Dothraki, "a lot of their insults come from perceived failures in masculinity or virility."

Insults are one thing, but what more did Peterson learn about the Dothraki culture from working with the dialogue this season that he didn't know before? "There is a very specific facet, not of Dothraki daily life but Dothraki culture that is hinted at earlier but never explored," Peterson offers. "It's now explored in this season, and so that led to some discoveries and some new terminology, but I can't get too far into it."

What Peterson can help us with is turning some beloved Australian expressions into Dothraki ones. Please check out our handy phrase guide below...

CYNTHIA WANG

Australian To Dothraki Phrase Guide

G'day, mate! = M'athchomaroon!

Fair dinkum = tawak

Fair suck of the sav = Yer qorae javrath sajosi anni. ("You're grabbing my horse's reins.")

Beer? = Lamekh ohazho? (That's fermented mare's milk, the Dothraki drink of choice)

No worries! = Me vosi!

Howzat? = Fini hazi? ("What is that?")

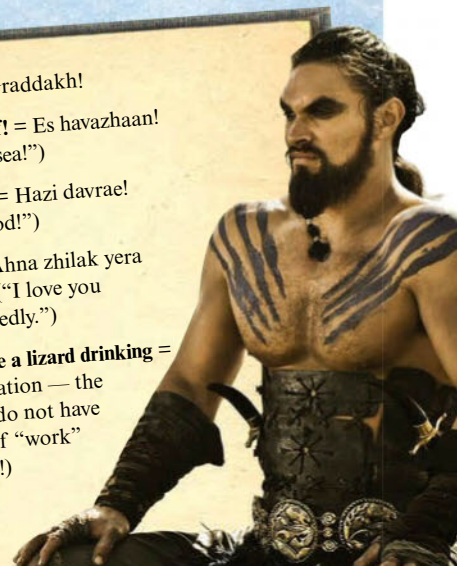
Oh, shit! = Graddakh!

Nick/rack off! = Es havazhaan! ("Go to the sea!")

You bewdy! = Hazi davrae! ("That's good!")

Love ya = Ahna zhilak yera norethaan ("I love you wholeheartedly.")

Flat out like a lizard drinking = (No translation — the Dothraki do not have a notion of "work" like we do!)





GAME OF THRONES SPECIAL / PART III

The Power Behind The Throne

The phenomenal success of *Game Of Thrones* is down to its reality rather than its fantasy, argues historian Tom Holland



In *Game Of Thrones*, there is really only the one throne that matters.

It sits in the Red Keep of King's Landing, the mighty seat of royal power from which, in HBO's adaptation of George R.R. Martin's epic series of novels, kings have ruled Westeros for 300 years. Forged out of swords melted by dragon breath, it commemorates the feat of conquest that saw a single, continent-spanning realm fashioned out of seven previously discrete kingdoms. Throughout, it serves as a menacing stage-prop: a reminder of what is at stake. No-one can hope to be crowned as victor in the game of thrones until he — or she — sits on it unchallenged. "The swords of the vanquished, a thousand of them, melted together like so many candles": such is the Iron Throne.

Or is it? Although *Game Of Thrones* is recognisably fantasy, there are people in Westeros no less hard-headed and sceptical of myth than in our own world. Power does not belong only to those who wear crowns, and it is often those who lurk behind the Iron Throne who understand its workings best. In a seminal scene from Season 3 episode *The Climb*, two of these functionaries meet: Varys, the royal spymaster (Conleth Hill), and Petyr Baelish, the King's Master Of Coin (Aiden Gillen). Both are cynical and ruthless; both able to penetrate with a pathologist's eye the darkest recesses of human nature. The lessons they draw, though, are very different. When Varys, gazing at the Iron Throne, refers to the thousand swords from which it is said to have been made, Baelish scoffs that, in reality, there aren't even 200. "But what do we have left," Varys demands, "once we abandon the lie?" Swift and sure comes the answer: "Chaos."

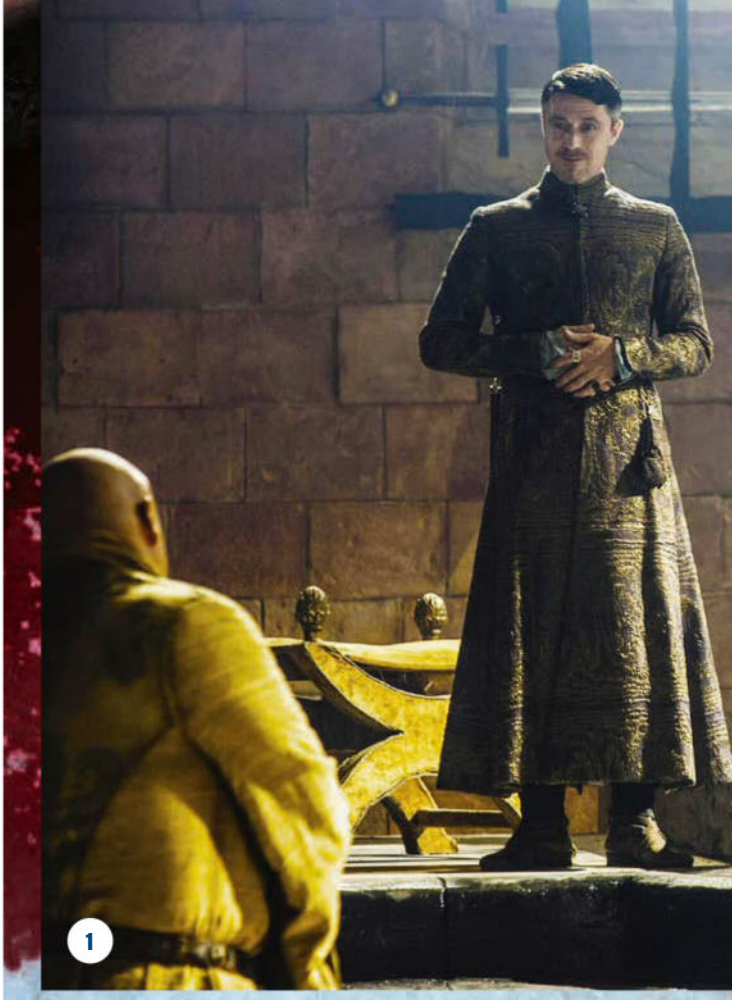
Power-brokers in the Republican Party or the EU are doubtless having similar conversations right now. Naturally, the personal stakes in Westeros are considerably higher than in Washington or Brussels. Those who play and lose in its game of thrones risk losing their heads — or at a minimum, their genitals. Varys himself, castrated as a child by a sorcerer who then burnt his scrotum and penis as part of a ritual, has no illusions as to the horror which can engulf a society. Chaos, he declares, is a pit — and he has no wish to fall into it. Amoral though he appears, secretly he is working to save Westeros. *Game Of Thrones* would not have become the astonishing success it is without offering its viewers some genuine heroes. Codes of honour and displays of kindness are to be found even in the darkest places.

Repeatedly, though, they gutter, or else are snuffed out altogether. "Chaos isn't a pit," Baelish tells Varys. "Chaos is a ladder." Loyalty to the realm, or the gods, or love: all are illusions. "Only the ladder is real. The climb is all there is."

Baelish himself, as murderous as he is subtle, proves as adept as anyone at scaling it; but he is not alone in exploiting the implosion of Westeros into civil war. As it splinters, so the lineaments of the seven kingdoms absorbed into it start to show again; and so the ambitions of rival houses turn ever more carnivorous. The truth is — as *Game Of Thrones* has brutally demonstrated — that both Varys and Baelish are right. Chaos simultaneously engulfs and elevates. The deeper the pit, the more tempting the ladder.

THE CONSEQUENCE IS THE

prodigious spectacle of death and suffering for which *Game Of Thrones* has become notorious. Even as it has replaced *Harry Potter* as the surest source of employment for British character actors, so also do its blood-spattered plots necessitate a relentless culling of the cast. Stars who in any other series would have been able to book in for the long haul are liable to find themselves chewed up and spat out. The trick pulled by Hitchcock in *Psycho*, of dispatching a seemingly central protagonist less than half-way through the film, is one *Game Of Thrones* has repeatedly played on its viewers. Footage of people watching Season 3's *Red*


1


2


3







1 Royal spymaster Varys (Conleth Hill) and King's Master Of Coin Petyr Baelish (Aiden Gillen) converse beside the Iron Thone in *The Climb*.
2 Catelyn Stark (Michelle Fairley) during Season 3's infamous Red Wedding.
3 Olly (Brenock O'Connor) betrays Jon Snow (Kit Harington) in the final scene of Season 5.

Wedding, when a whole slew of characters were wiped out in a single sitting, rapidly went viral. Viewers gasped, cried out, clasped their hands to their mouths. Rare is the TV drama that can deliver such a shock.

Some of us, of course, had known full well what was coming. Because, for five seasons the TV series had been able to track the books that inspired it, giving readers a head start. Last season, though, that was starting to change. Assorted plotlines began to go dramatically off-piste. Various hideous things happened that the novels had failed to flag up. And when, in the last scene of the series, Jon Snow was shown bleeding to death, Martin's readers were left as uncertain as anyone as to whether he was truly dead.

The Winds Of Winter, the next in the sequence of his novels, and which had originally been slated for publication before Christmas, remains unfinished; and as a result, as Martin himself has put it, "There will be certain plot twists and reveals in Season 6 of *Game Of Thrones* that have not yet happened in the books." The previews, making play with this, have been pointedly enigmatic. One shows the Hall Of Faces, an enormous vault deep in the bowels of a great stone temple, where the faces of the dead are kept — and although some belong to characters already slain over the course of the series, others do not. "They have no idea what's going to happen," a voice-over intones. For the first time, this is true of pretty much everyone.

The same, of course, could be said of the new season of any number of series, from *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* to *Downton Abbey*. Never before, though, has there been a show on the scale of *Game Of Thrones*. What befalls its protagonists reverberates across continents.

As in Martin's novels, so in the TV adaptations: the fascination of the series lies as much in the detail as in the plotting. Rarely does anything happen so extraordinary that it slips the moorings of a vividly evoked sense of place. An army of mouldering corpses storms a distant northern harbour in Season 5 episode *Hardhome*, and it is less the immaculately realised special effects that make it seem credible than the chill lapping of the ocean, the wisps of icy mist, and the portrayal of an entire way of life under siege. In Season 3's fourth episode, a dragon incinerates a slave-master with a single blast of breath, and his death, rather than seeming something conjured up from folktale, serves instead as the emblem of a social revolution.

Spanning as it does the extremes of ice and fire, the world of *Game Of Thrones* provides an immersiveness that is without precedent in TV fantasy. Zombies and dragons have no more starring a role in it than do its class structures, or its religious tensions, or its attitudes to the roles of men and women. Three-eyed ravens alternate with bankers; shape-shifters with smugglers. The appeal of the world in *Game Of Thrones* is not that it is fantastical, but that it is precisely the opposite: richly and brutally real.

ALL OF WHICH HELPS TO

explain why it is not just the greatest fantasy epic ever shown on TV, but the greatest historical epic as well. Westeros is recognisably bred of Europe's past. The series' backstory echoes the period which Shakespeare covered in his first series of history plays: the 15th century *Wars Of The Roses*, which saw the rival houses of Lancaster and York feuding over the English crown.

Head north, though, and the further from King's Landing the action moves, the further back in time it seems to take us. Banners flutter, donjons soar into the sky, and knights-errant undertake quests across landscapes that seem conjured from the heyday of the Middle Ages. Further north yet, an offshore kingdom armed with longships echoes Viking Scandinavia, while Winterfell, the stronghold in which the series opens, has more than a touch of the Anglo-Saxon.

At its very northernmost limit, the kingdom ruled from King's Landing is guarded by a massive rampart of ice: a defensive line that Martin has readily acknowledged was inspired by a visit to Hadrian's Wall. As in the Roman Empire, though, so in Westeros; the world does not end at the frontier of civilisation. Continue north, and the journey back into prehistory is precipitous. The snowy landscape beyond the Wall, complete with shamans and woolly mammoths, is recognisably that of the Ice Age. The nightmares bred there too, and which cast their shadow over the very first sequence in *Game Of Thrones*, seem conjured from a primordial darkness. If winter is coming, then it comes from the fabulously distant past.

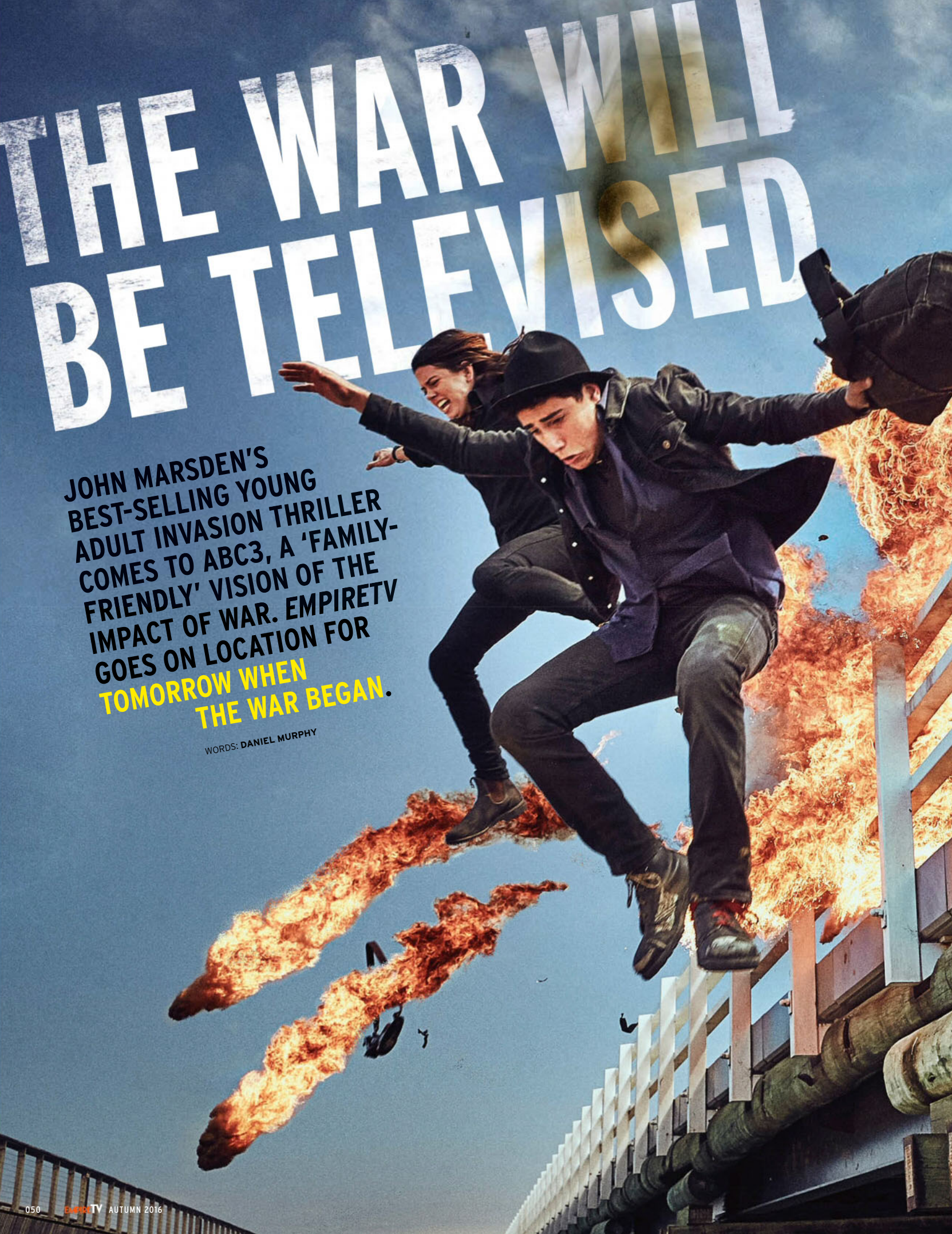
"Fear is for the long night, when the sun hides for years and children are born and live and die all in darkness." So an old woman, the nurse of a son of the lord of Winterfell, tells her charge early in the first season. "That is the time for fear, my little lord, when the white walkers move through the woods."

That the long night may now at last be at hand, and the white walkers with it, does not diminish the potency of *Game Of Thrones* as a historical drama. Just the opposite. Dread of apocalypse, be it in the form of a wolf devouring the sun or a war in the heavens, haunted the imaginings of our ancestors. Ominous wonders were as assiduously tracked as the course of the harvests. Dragons in the skies were believed to portend the deaths of princes. As in Westeros, so in medieval Europe: the peril that was believed to lurk in the dimension of the supernatural could seem no less real than plague, or famine, or war.

The Iron Throne remains at the start of Season 6 in the Red Keep: the ultimate prize for all those who believe chaos is a ladder. Simultaneously, as the show's most fearsome sorceress, Melisandre, has warned, "The true war lies to the north." The power-struggle among mortal kings is nothing. "Death marches on the Wall." It is as though, in a drama about 1066, Harold were not fated to lose at Hastings, and demons were gearing up to cross the North Sea. The big problem with historical dramas is that we tend to know what happens. The genius of *Game Of Thrones* is to let us experience what it is like, when looking to the medieval past, not to know who wins.

TOM HOLLAND IS THE AUTHOR OF NUMEROUS BOOKS ON ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL HISTORY. HIS LATEST IS *DYNASTY: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CAESAR*.

THE WAR WILL BE TELEVISED



JOHN MARSDEN'S BEST-SELLING YOUNG ADULT INVASION THRILLER COMES TO ABC3, A 'FAMILY-FRIENDLY' VISION OF THE IMPACT OF WAR. *EMPIRETV* GOES ON LOCATION FOR TOMORROW WHEN THE WAR BEGAN.

WORDS: **DANIEL MURPHY**



Ellie (Molly Daniels) and Homer (Narek Arman) escape enemy fire .

YOUNG GUNS



CHARACTER: Ellie
PLAYED BY: Molly Daniels
YOU'VE SEEN HER ON: *You're Skitting Me*, *The Librarians*

How did you get into character to play Ellie?
She's super brainy, and tough, so she's kinda different from me. I guess it was mostly about she's a farm girl, and I'm a city girl so it was about learning a little more about farming, and reading the books and trying to figure her out. She's very tough and honest, and so just getting into that mindset was the main thing. Re-reading the first book was probably the best thing to do. I'm really lucky because it is written from her point of view so you get so much insight into what she's like, which is a bit of a blessing.

Have there been any emotionally challenging days on set?
There have been some pretty full-on things. I guess the ones where big things are happening and you have to act really scared and overwhelmed are probably the worst because they're a double whammy. We had a day last week where these bombs were going off next to us and we had to act really scared, which was easy because we were genuinely really scared even though we were safe, obviously.

Were you able to get to know the cast before shooting?
We had two weeks of getting to know each other where we rehearsed a bit. We had boot camp which was two days of just training. But I think we all clicked super-fast and I guess you bond over the being excited part which is great, you're all excited about the same thing and you're on the same page really fast. I think we got tight really quickly.







A GROUP OF ELDERLY Australians are standing in a little civic park off Fraser St., the main road in Clunes, a pretty colonial town about 30 minutes north of Ballarat. But it's not their hometown they are seeing. In front of them is a skin-crawling mayhem on the main drag: smoke billows from shrapnel-shredded, overturned cars including a completely monstered police paddy wagon, jackbooted goons in sinister military kit and balaclavas warily investigate destroyed shopfronts (the newsagent spruiking the fictional *Wirrawee Standard* newspaper), assault rifles at the low ready. The crack of distant gunfire beats out and a machine-gun-mounted armoured truck turns onto Fraser.

The older folk are oddly relaxed, chatting and laughing. A loud bang precedes a commotion: a terrified Asian youth carrying a rifle weaves pell-mell down the street, taking quick cover between the wrecks before sliding heavily onto his knees into the open door of an abandoned jeep, playing possum as the patrol motors past. Once clear, the kid gets up and limps hastily into a side street.

All through it, the group of pensioners are commentating.

"Here he comes!"

"Look at him go!"

"Geez, that must hurt. Is he dead?"

"He must be."

"No, of course he isn't. Look, he's getting up."

"Off he goes!"

Top: The gang of friends – Lee (Jon Prasida), Ellie (Molly Daniels), Robyn (Fantine Banulski), Fiona (Madeleine Clunies-Ross), Homer (Narek Arman), Kevin (Andrew Creer) and Corrie (Madeleine Madden) – confront a new world.
Above, from left: Director Brendan Maher (in back, no hat) on the move; James Stewart oozes sinister as The Colonel; Lee and Ellie do some circle work; the Asian Coalition troops move into Wirrawee's main street.







"Cut! Let's go again!"

This last one is not from our group, but the conversation continues about the lad's odds of survival in the fictional reality and how that slide must really be hell on the joints. A chap with a walking stick winces for effect. Everybody resumes first positions and *Tomorrow When The War Began*, the ABC3 TV series, is back in business.

Later, actor Jon Prasida reveals that his knees are fine, despite the concerns of the citizens of Clunes. "Yeah, knee pads and a bum pad. Still I didn't fall right once and banged up my wrist. Not that I care. I was in the zone. I love all aspects of acting, but something about the physical stuff I really enjoy."

At 24, Prasida is the eldest of the young ensemble of actors assembled to flesh out the characters of John Marsden's enduringly popular teen-thriller *Tomorrow…* novels, where a group of normal teens return from a camping trip to their Victorian country town to find it occupied by an invading army from the newly formed Asian Coalition (personified by *Packed To The Rafters*' James Stewart's nasty commander, The Colonel), their parents imprisoned or dead. They then take up arms against the invaders. (See profile panels).

If this sounds familiar, then you have: a) read the novels, or b) seen the 2010 film *Tomorrow, When The War Began*. Producer Michael Boughen, who brought *Tomorrow…* to the big screen, accepts that the constraints of time kept the film from being all it could be.

"That's why we wanted to go to the ›

CHARACTER: Corrie
PLAYED BY: Madeleine Madden
YOU'VE SEEN HER ON: *Ready For This*, *Redfern Now*, *Around The Block*

Who is Corrie?
I think Corrie has a lot of depth to her. She really looks for the zest of life and she's very much a nurturer. She sees herself going on and helping the world. She's somebody that belongs to the world, I think she is quite keen to get out of Wirrawee. She sees Kevin, her boyfriend, as somebody who's tying her down, a bit of excess baggage, and I think that she's very independent in that way.

Most actors find romantic scenes harder than action scenes. Is that the case?
For me, no. I think it is really difficult with emotional scenes, you have to get into that mindset. For me, my way of working through things is very visceral, I take things from experiences in my life and use that. So usually, when you finish a scene there is no way to warm down, you take a lot of what you experience home with you, which is hard to get rid of. With romantic scenes and all that, Andrew [*Creer, who plays Kevin*]'s great. We're all so close and muck around like that anyway. But for me, I think it's the emotional things that are harder because it's personal, and you do feel really vulnerable.

Have you read the books?
Yeah, massive fan of John Marsden's writing. Everyone is so keen on it. We all sit there and read together and exchange what's going on. And ways he gets into —especially — Ellie's mind is incredible. Don't know how he does it.



YOUNG GUNS



CHARACTER: Fiona
PLAYED BY: Madeleine Clunies-Ross
YOU'VE SEEN HER ON: This is her first project outside of theatre in school: "I finished school last year, the end of 2014. I had always done drama at school, and I did a play at ATYP when I was in year 11."

Who is Fiona?
Fiona is sort of the new kid to town, and she has come from the city. So I guess she is more sheltered in a way, and her family shelters her. I would call her – at the beginning – the innocent one in the group. She's then thrown into the deep end, and realises she's going to have to spend a lot of time with these rural people. She goes through a lot of change throughout the series, because she's forced to grow up a lot considering the circumstances.

How did you get into character?
I couldn't tell you that, but there was one specific thing I did. But I think obviously being on set and being in costume with the other actors, you sort of grow into it. Obviously I did a lot of script analysis and I went through my objective in each scene, and I gave my character a bit of a background which wasn't explicitly stated in the script. But in regards to actually getting into character on set, it just sort of happens naturally once you're surrounded by everyone and once you've read through the lines and blocked out the scenes.

What was the best day on set?
Well, the last day on set was pretty amazing because we got to do this really fun paint fight. Brendan [*Maher, director*] basically told us to literally have a paint fight which was so much fun, and it was the last scene we were doing for the whole series. So it was very exciting.





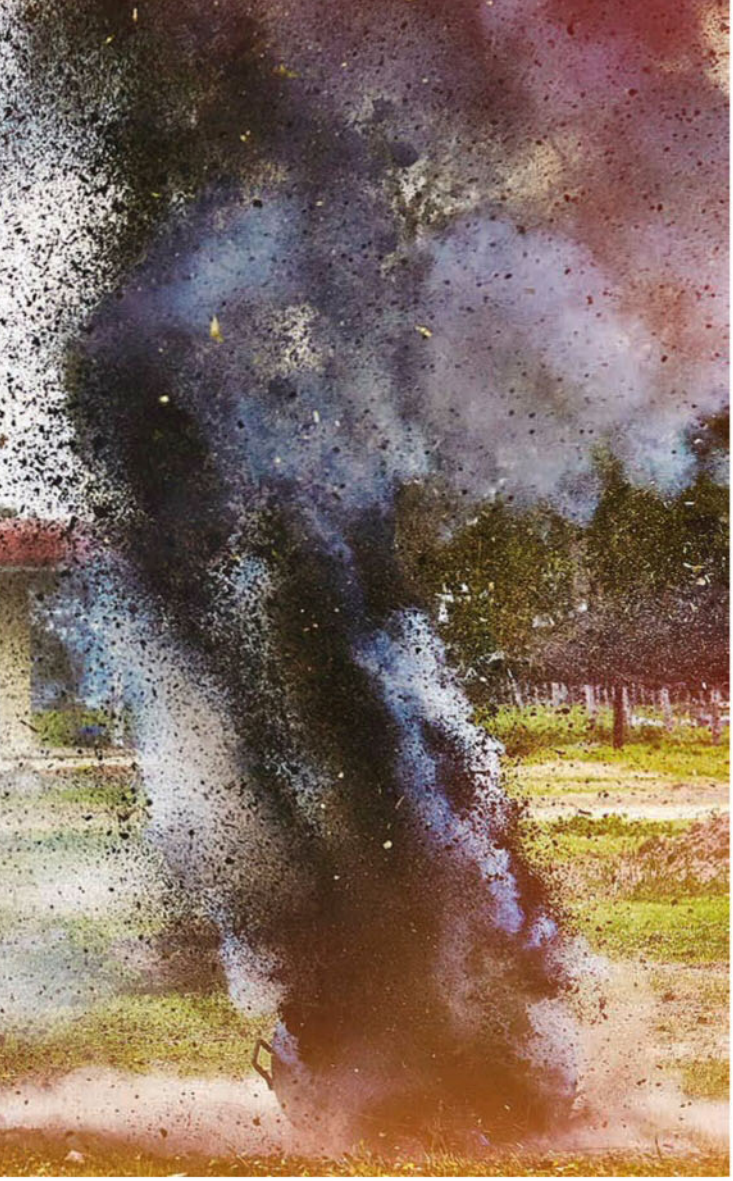


TV series," he tells *EmpireTV* in the outdoor seating of an abandoned Thai restaurant. "I had a second script written for the film, for a sequel, and it was all go. But we realised it was more of the same. It was hard to get it to a place where you thought you were going to do something different. The TV series offered the opportunity for us to let the story marinate, bubble away and look at things from the novel missing from the film, like Hermit's Hut.

"One hundred minutes is a hundred minutes and the film requires a lot of action. With a series you can really explore the characters and delve into their motivations, see them develop on screen."

That is a familiar motif to anyone reading these pages. But Stuart Beattie's film had other problems. The film's cast, despite only a year or two older than the actors in the show, were *trés* glossy and mature for 17-year-olds. Also, with an M-rating arguably warranted by the book's tone and content, the action still fell somewhere between authentic and diluted. The solution for Boughen and director Brendan Maher — who steers all six one-hour episodes — was to aim right at the kids who read the books for the

Top: Ellie and Lee dodge the mortars.
Above left to right: The kids sneak into town; A little payback time; Mums Kath (Deborah Mailman) and Liz (Alison Bell) anguished and imprisoned in the series' new storyline.







first time, and their parents who'd read the books at a similar age in the 1990s. Thus it's on the national broadcaster's 'older kids' channel. "I think this is a really bold move by ABC3, to say, 'We want to be in this space'," enthuses Boughen. "We want to do not just kids' drama, but family drama. It's something the BBC does very well. Yes, they make kids' stuff and adult stuff, but they also do family stuff. It's a space that I think it's really important for more TV to get into. We treat this as a drama, an action-thriller with a PG rating."

Which would indicate that certain realities of life in a hostile-occupied country would need to be ignored. Not so, says the producer. "Violence is relative. You can imply and have great impact. Or you can be incredibly bloodthirsty and have impact. For me, I like the 'theatre of the mind' type approach. This is more about the situation, the fear, the terror and the unknown, as opposed to limbs blowing off. This is much more interesting, dynamic thing to delve into — this instant dystopia. PG is fine."

The director, Maher, agrees. "We had to be constantly aware of our PG rating. But in a way, the show, or that war story, it's not about blood and guts, although it is bloody. But it's still emotionally really impactful. We don't back off on the emotion at all."

TO HELP MAP THE EMOTION

and ensure the length of the narrative stays busy, the creators have included a storyline around the kids' parents, interred by the Asian Coalition force. Quality character actors like Deborah Mailman, Alison Bell and Sibylla Budd evolve this storyline. But the main game is the relationships between Ellie (Molly Daniels), Corrie (Madeleine Madden), Fiona (Madeleine Clunies-Ross), Homer (Narek Arman), Kevin (Andrew Creer) and Robyn (Fantine Banulski), and their struggle with the invasion, being fugitives and the guerrilla war they engage in. The actors are young — two were still at high school and in some cases unseen on screens before now. Ask any of them how they found the weight of emotions required and they speak of their director in hallowed terms. "Brendan impressed upon me…"; "I asked Brendan and he said…"; "Brendan's key note for me was 'energy'."

So does Boughen, who acknowledges the horse whispering job the veteran TV director pulled off. "He'd just finished a series called *The Passing Bells* for the BBC in London in 2014, about two young boys in WWI — one from Germany, one from England — getting excited by war, going to war, their journeys and coming together. We watched him working with those young actors and seeing war and a war zone in a relatively bloodless way — it was a really interesting interpretation."

The director was determined to cast the right actor, no matter their background, then build the character from/with them. "I really love putting young actors into the audition room," says Maher. "We have a bit of a talk about the script, I make sense of what kind of person they are, and what sort of ›

CHARACTER: Robyn
PLAYED BY: Fantine Banulski
YOU'VE SEEN HER ON: *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries, Underbelly Files: Infiltration*

How did you flesh out your character?
The big thing was not being a stereotype, and that was a big thing the director, Brendan, was very sure of, not stereotyping Robyn as the stuck-up Christian, Fi the dumb blonde pretty girl, Ellie the kind of bossy leader. It's very easy for us to play into that. But I just wanted to make sure that Robyn wasn't just like a boring Christian or something like that. She's a teenage girl. She loves having fun, she can be cheeky, she doesn't always follow the rules.

How does the TV series compare to the film?
I think that because it is a TV show, it really gives each character their own storyline, and their own kind of journey and arc. Thinking about it, every single character has some sort of development or goes through great change. There's time for that over the six episodes. That's one thing I loved most about the scripts as well, is that it is more of an ensemble. So everyone is kind of equal.

Before you were cast, who was your favourite character in the series?
I was younger when I read the books, I didn't really understand the role of Robyn quite so much because she's a very quiet, complex, and mature character. So I think Ellie was my favourite. But now, doing the role, I love Robyn and want to defend her to anyone who says otherwise.



YOUNG GUNS



CHARACTER: Lee
PLAYED BY: Jon Prasida
YOU'VE SEEN HIM ON: *Hiding*, *Ready For This*

Who is Lee?
I see a lot of Lee in myself. I see him as the observant type, in his head a lot, thinks a lot. I would say that there is a lot of that in me. In real life, I'm a little more charismatic, but there is something about Lee that is so... still. It's mesmerising, I really admire it. As a teenager, he is wiser than the rest of the group.

What can fans of the book expect from the TV series?
The story has been altered a little, but for this day and age, that makes sense. It's benefited what the series can become. They can expect a truthful display of what we have to offer. It's real. It's not all about the explosions, there is emotional stuff going on with every character.



CHARACTER: Homer
PLAYED BY: Narek Arman
YOU'VE SEEN HIM ON: *The Principal*, *Packed To The Rafters*, *Dance Academy*

Who is Homer?
First word that comes to mind is 'oddball'. He's very genuine and soft on the inside, very caring, but doesn't want to show it too much. Obviously when all that war stuff starts to happen, he lets it all out, becomes quite vulnerable. But it isn't a flaw, it actually helps.

Did you read the books before you were cast?
I walked into the audition, and Brendan, the director, asked me if I had read the books and I had no idea that there were books! I literally said "Wait. There are books?" I queried him. But I did buy the first book! I think I'm about six pages through.



COMING SOON — APRIL



12 Monkeys: S2

CREATORS **TERRY MATALAS, TRAVIS FICKETT** / CAST **AARON STANFORD, AMANDA SCHULL** / CATCH-UP **SYFY, FOXTEL GO, FOXTEL PLAY, ITUNES, GOOGLE PLAY** / FROM **APRIL 20**
In some intriguing casting news, Madeleine Stowe from the *12 Monkeys* film will turn up this season in a role reversal: in the movie, she played Dr. Railly (now played by Schull) – in the show she'll play a mental asylum patient.

Banshee: S4

CREATORS **JONATHAN TROPPER, DAVID SCHICKLER** / CAST **ANTONY STARR, ELIZA DUSHKU, IVANA MILICEVIC** / CATCH-UP **FOX8, FOXTEL GO, FOXTEL PLAY, ITUNES, GOOGLE PLAY** / FROM **APRIL 15**
Buffy's Eliza Dushku joins the cast in this final season as the exploits of Lucas Hood (Starr), an expert thief masquerading as a small town sheriff, reach their explosive conclusion.

Dice

CREATOR **SCOT ARMSTRONG** / CAST **ANDREW DICE CLAY, CHRIS WILLIAMS** / CATCH-UP **STAN** / FROM **APRIL 11**
Late-'80s stand-up comedy megastar and actor Andrew Dice Clay has already made a comeback in reality (see *Entourage*, *Blue Jasmine*, *Vinyl*), but in this *Curb Your Enthusiasm*-sounding series he's playing a fictional version of himself attempting a comeback on the stand-up comedy circuit.

Inside Amy Schumer: S4

CREATOR **AMY SCHUMER** / CAST **AMY SCHUMER** / CATCH-UP **THE COMEDY CHANNEL, FOXTEL GO, FOXTEL PLAY, ITUNES, GOOGLE PLAY** / FROM **APRIL TBC**
The Queen of comedy, viral video and pop culture in general is back – and will be back for the foreseeable future with Season 5 already announced for 2017. Look out for Aussie star on the rise, comedian Claudia O'Doherty.

Kong: King Of The Apes

CREATOR **AVI ARAD** / CAST **TBC** / CATCH-UP **NETFLIX** / FROM **APRIL 15**
King Kong! Gigantic robot dinosaurs! Quality animation!



Jon Prasida prepares for another take, and another charge down Fraser St.

personality they have and what that can bring to the character. I tend to exploit what is in them already and what is good for the character. And then, if they get the gig, I sit with them for quite some time and we go through, in this case, six hours of television scene by scene, find out why they're in the scene, what they've got to achieve in the scene, and how you might do that and what the issues are.

"I love the young cast, I loved their bravery. I just loved how we talked about putting your guts on the table. You've got to be truthful, you can't hide behind anything here, you've really got to be up front about it. And they just turned up every day and did it."

There are hopes across the board for a second and third season — there are seven books in the series, plus another three, featuring Ellie post-*War* — and due to the international sales of the books, well, international sales of the series. "The scale of the show is great to be doing in Australia as well," says Maher. "To be doing it with this age group of young actors is fantastic. I love the idea that our audience will really get off on the action sequences in the show because we tried to de-Hollywood it as much as we possibly could. A lot of our ambition was about taking our audience into the reality of war. What is the reality of coming home from a camping trip and then your parents aren't there and you realise you've been abandoned? What does that actually mean, how does it affect the character emotionally, what are your feelings, what drives you, what do you have to do?"

For Jon Prasida, it's a case of dusting off and tearing in again down Wirrawee/Clunes' main street, dodging the foreign troops and sliding on his padded knees and arse into the car's door. The senior citizens loitering out of camera-line alongside *EmpireTV* haven't budged in the 15 minutes between takes. They are laughing and joking, enjoying the best show in town. With its gold rush history and colonial architecture, Clunes is a favourite for filmmakers. One lovely lady was about when *Ned Kelly* and *Mad Max* blew through. As the call for action wafts over on the stiff breeze, all heads turn left in anticipation.

"Here he comes," someone says.

TOMORROW WHEN THE WAR BEGAN **BEGINS ON ABC3 AT 7.30PM ON SATURDAY, APRIL 23.**

CHARACTER: Kevin
PLAYED BY: Andrew Creer
YOU'VE SEEN HIM ON: This is his first project – he graduated early from the Western Australian Academy of the Performing Arts to work on *TWTWB*

Who is Kevin?
When I first spoke to Brendan about it, he said that to most people, this character seems to have been put in there to be the macho one in the group, the one who is there to stir the pot. But the way we've fleshed out the character and the relationships with his family, it really gives Kevin a massive heart. It's been so much fun playing him. As a country boy myself – I grew up in Tamworth – and to have a similar upbringing to Kevin's, to play a character with a three-dimensional purpose rather than just a classic Australian male with the long hair and the good-lookin' girlfriend is so much fun.

Was the shoot emotionally challenging?
The beauty of going to an acting school is that they can prep you. But they never prep you to the point where you can come here and portray a situation like this, being at war. And Brendan was clear, we're just normal kids – war is nothing that we are prepared to cope with. Trying to put yourself into those situations and given circumstances – losing loved ones, seeing family members die – has been a real experience.

Did you read the books before being cast?
Yeah, I'd read the first three prior to being cast, then read the rest. The series has lots of elements that aren't in the books, building on the scaffolding of the books.





On the face of it, there's a lot to be excited about with this reimagining of the pop culture icon from Arad, the superhero movie mega producer. A TV series will follow on the heels of a feature film.

Outlander: S2

CREATOR **RONALD P. MOORE** / CAST **CAITRIONA BALFE, SAM HEUGHAN, TOBIAS MENZIES** / CATCH-UP **SOHO, FOXTEL GO, FOXTEL PLAY, ITUNES, GOOGLE PLAY** / FROM **APRIL 10**
The steamy time-travelling bodice ripper returns with Season 2 set to be based on the second in Diana Gabaldon's historical romance series. But aficionados of the novels should be prepared for some deviations of plotlines, warns producer Moore.

The Americans: S4

CREATOR **JOSEPH WEISBERG** / CAST **KERI RUSSELL, MATTHEW RHYS, NOAH EMMERICH** / CATCH-UP **SOHO, FOXTEL GO, FOXTEL PLAY, ITUNES** / FROM **APRIL TBC**
There'll be a new frisson of danger in Season 4 now that Paige (Holly Taylor) has told Pastor Tim (Kelly Aucoin) that her parents (Russell, Rhys) are really KGB spies. Will the good pastor keep schtum?

Veep: S5

CREATOR **ARMANDO IANNUCCI** / CAST **JULIA LOUIS-DREYFUS, ANNA CHLUMSKY, TONY HALE** / CATCH-UP **SHOWCASE, FOXTEL GO, FOXTEL PLAY, ITUNES, GOOGLE PLAY** / FROM **APRIL 26**
Change is afoot behind and in front of the camera this season with the departure of creator Armando Iannucci and the will-she-won't-she-be presidential status of Selina Meyers (Louis-Dreyfus) left cliffhanging in Season 4.

Wentworth: S4

CREATORS **REG WATSON, LARA RADULOVICH** / CAST **DANIELLE CORMACK, NICOLE DA SILVA, KATE ATKINSON** / CATCH-UP **SOHO, FOXTEL GO, FOXTEL PLAY, ITUNES [TBC]** / FROM **APRIL TBC**
In Season 4, Sigrid Thornton joins the cast, the only original *Prisoner* cast member – on which *Wentworth* is based – to pop up on the show to date. She'll play Sonia, a cosmetics entrepreneur who is suspected of murder.



No Fear

After a promising start, *Fear The Walking Dead* continues to expand the 'walker' universe. Star Cliff Curtis and EP David Alpert give glimpses into the aquatic splendour of S2

WORDS: **DANIEL MURPHY**

IT WAS A TANTALISING notion, but it could have gone either way. Tell an original story from *The Walking Dead* universe without a Robert Kirkman-penned comic book source, do it in big city Los Angeles instead of gothic south Georgia, do it from the beginning of the infection during the month Rick's unconscious, do it with an ensemble from the get go, do it as a dysfunctional family drama. That's more meat than a walker could chew, surely. And yet, the odd wobble aside, *Fear The Walking Dead* worked, and is back for a 15 episode run.

"I've never really worked in this kind of genre before — no big weekly events and no horror or anything remotely gory. So, I was surprised [*with S1's success*]," says Cliff Curtis, the Kiwi actor who plays decent patriarch Travis Manawa. "I had far more modest aspirations for the show and it's amazing that the numbers kept rolling in. Taking the story in

another direction meant people might not have liked it. Not because the show wasn't good but you never really know in this business what the audience wants."

Accordingly, and no doubt learning from *TWD*'s soporific second season, *Fear*'s S2 ramps up the action. "It's a completely different show," Curtis claims. "The scale of the new season is impressive." But what direction that action goes in is something that really milks the creative glands of the show's creators, as producer on both shows, David Alpert, tells us. "One of the great assets that we have on *The Walking Dead* is that we have 150-some odd issues of the comic book that lay out everything, from storyline, characters, looks, wardrobe, weapons, there's an entire thought-out universe that provides a really strong roadmap. We've had a great writing team that takes that and zigs and zags from the map, but it always gives us something to go back to anytime we get ourselves stuck in a corner, we feel like we really always have something to turn to.

"Going into *Fear*, we were doubly handicapped," he continues. "On the one hand we don't have a roadmap, plus we have 150 issues of a comic, and 70-odd eps of the TV show that we have to *not do*. There are a lot of really fun gags and a lot of really fun avenues that we can't go down, so we start already in a smaller box. Our goal is to try and make this show feel powerful as a stand-alone show. There are no characters in common, there's no overlap, there's not a moment where, 'Joey's leaving *Friends* to do *Joey*' with an entirely new cast and crew. It's in the same universe of *The Walking Dead* but there's not the same intersection."

The coastal location is crucial to the difference. At the end of S1, the surviving band with Travis and Maddie (the great Kim Dickens) are poised to board 'Abigail', the motor yacht owned by real estate player Victor Strand (Colman Domingo). Alpert: "We haven't really explored what it means to be on the coast in *The Walking Dead*. In *Fear*, we're in Los Angeles, the coast is a major part of the city, the ocean's a big thing, so we're looking at that as a main aspect. There are a lot of opportunities, plentiful food, they have a certain way they have to get it and access it. But water becomes a real problem out there, dehydration, encountering other people, fuel becomes more of an ongoing issue."

The other strength for *Fear* is its quality cast, which, like *The Walking Dead*, is a decidedly international affair, including England's Frank Dillane (who plays Maddie's junkie son, Nick), Australia's Alycia Debnam-Carey (Alicia, Nick's sister), erm, Arizona's Lorenzo James Henrie (Travis's son Chris) and legendary Panamanian character actor Rubén Blades (as former Nicaraguan secret police torturer-turned barber Daniel Salazar). Despite both shows' tendencies for international casts, Alpert says it's not a conscious ploy.

"Honestly, we just looked for the best actors, and I feel like we ended up with really fantastic people. We really wanted to represent L.A., and L.A. is one of the most international cities in the world."

So, what can we expect in S2? "There's going to be zombies," David Alpert says, helpfully. "As things start to crumble and as society starts to come apart, the stakes continually get raised, so what we see in the beginning is the slow, gradual realisation that this is not going away. The unwritten rules about how people interact with each other are thrown out the window, so we see more violence and how you react to those fight-or-flight moments. Law and order is thrown out the window."

And don't discount the possibility of a hook-up between Travis's group and Rick's. Right? RIGHT? Alpert demurs, "We've kicked it around, we're fanboys, but how do those things connect? We're in L.A, Rick's people are in Georgia, you're like, 'Okay, with no telecommunications, no internet, there's not even a Pony Express, how do they even interact?' We'd like to try to figure that answer out in some interesting way, but we don't have that right now."

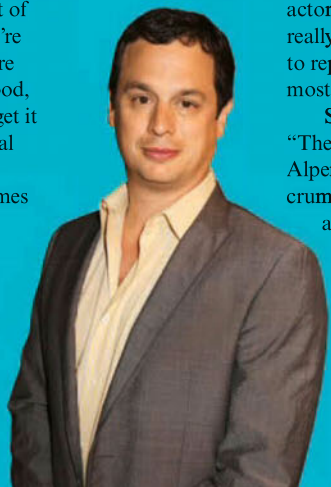
***FEAR THE WALKING DEAD* S2 STARTS AT 1.30PM ON MONDAY APRIL 11 ON FX.**



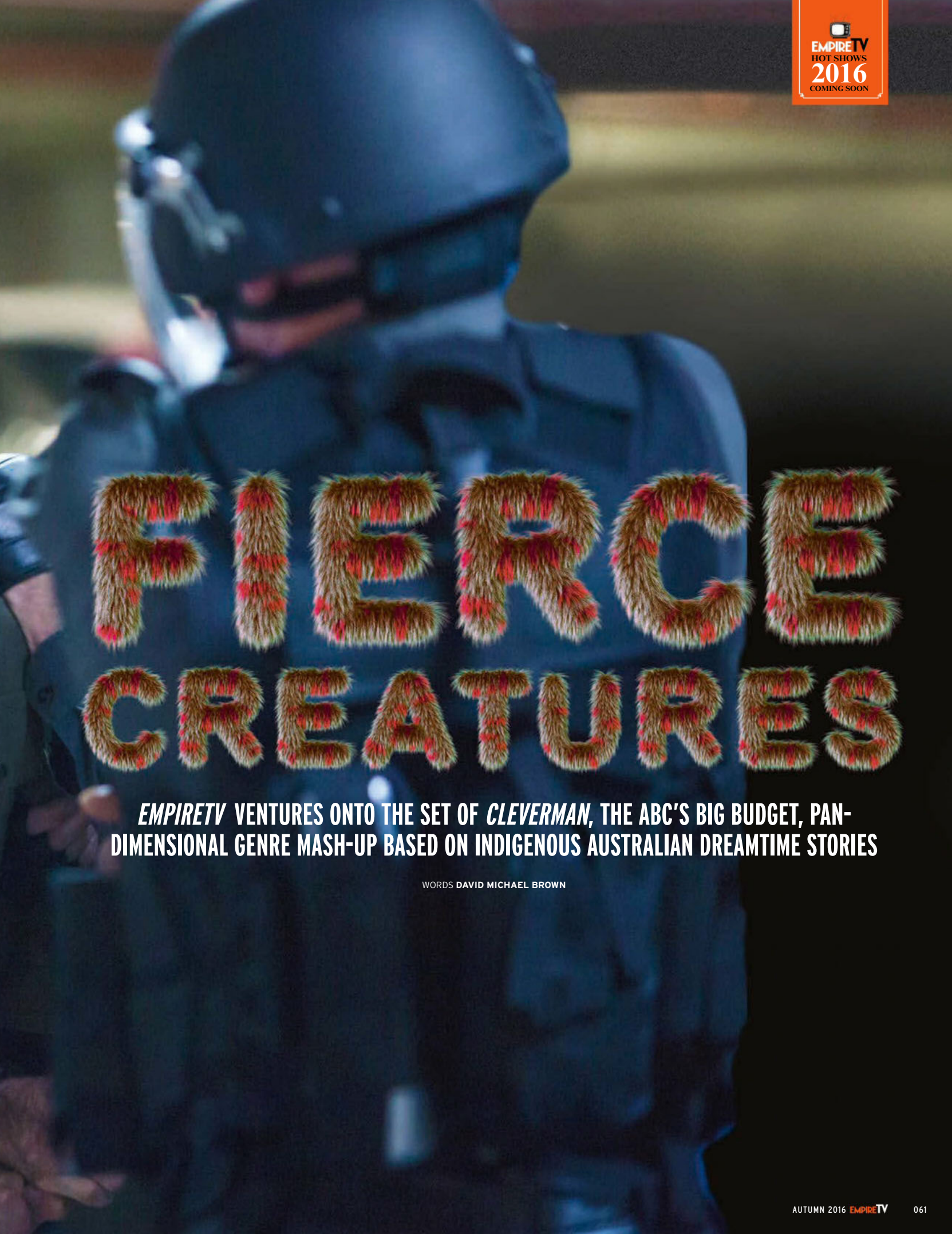




Clockwise from top: Daniel Salazar (Rubén Blades) stands watch; Alicia (Alycia Debnam-Carey); Travis (Cliff Curtis) and Maddie (Kim Dickens). All on a boat, yo!
Below: Producer David Alpert.







FIERCE CREATURES

EMPIRETV VENTURES ONTO THE SET OF *CLEVERMAN*, THE ABC'S BIG BUDGET, PAN-DIMENSIONAL GENRE MASH-UP BASED ON INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN DREAMTIME STORIES

WORDS **DAVID MICHAEL BROWN**



Maliyan (Adam Briggs) in The Zone.

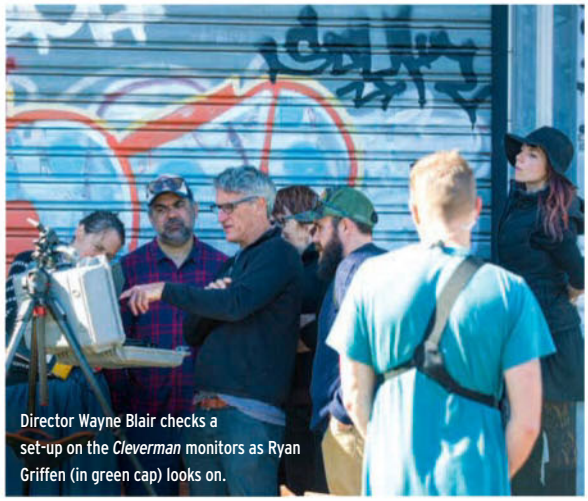
"WHERE'S OUR *Walking Dead*?" exclaims producer Rosemary Blight from Goalpost Pictures, the Aussie production company behind *The Sapphires* and *Holding The Man*. "Where are our home grown stories? Why haven't we done this before? These stories have been around for 60,000 years. It was like being struck with a lightning bolt," she exclaims. "We just had to find the right story."

EmpireTV is talking to Blight in a car park surrounded by graffiti-covered urban sprawl. She, along with Sally Riley from the ABC and Ryan Griffen, the man who found the right story, are part of the welcome party that greets us. We have arrived on the set of *Cleverman*, a new dystopian Aussie thriller, at the disused rail yards of Sydney's Carriageworks, a rusted vision of twisted tracks, perfectly accompanied by the soundtrack clatter of nearby Redfern station.

"I wanted to create an Aboriginal superhero," grins self-proclaimed genre fanatic Ryan Griffen, the intern turned producer and the creative force behind the show. The genesis of this ambitious morality thriller comes from an innocent place, as Griffen explains. "It started five years ago, spending the afternoon with my son. He was three at the time and we were both dressed up as Ninja Turtles playing in the backyard. We both have a huge love for comics, like any good parent does I've forced my good taste onto him, so he loves Batman and the Ninja Turtles," he laughs. "He is light-skinned Aboriginal as I am, and for me growing up, it was easy to defend my Aboriginality because as soon as they saw my dad, they accepted it. But for my son, there will be a point when he grows and will look at me and not see it so much. So I was trying to give him something by bringing his cultural identity and [*love of*] superheroes together.

"The more that you dive into the Dreaming stories," continues Griffen, "the more moral values they have. We started to tell them as a kids' show, we started to see that for a lot of these stories, the consequence is death. Putting them into a kids series was going to be problematic. If you steal a lolly, you're going to die," he laughs. "We aged it up and got to the point thinking what if we went all the way here? That's when we got Sally involved. She gave us the green light. From that point we attached ourselves to all the moral values of the stories, and put a whole lot of sex and violence on top!"

"It's probably one of the biggest budgets we've ever spent," chips in Riley. "It's certainly the biggest show in terms of aspiration. We are kind of excited, terrified and also just can't wait for the world to see it, because we don't think



Director Wayne Blair checks a set-up on the *Cleverman* monitors as Ryan Griffen (in green cap) looks on.



Leah Purcell directs Hunter Page-Lochard.



Hair and make-up designer Kath Brown and prosthetic supervisor Don Brooker work on Jack Charles's stomach wound.

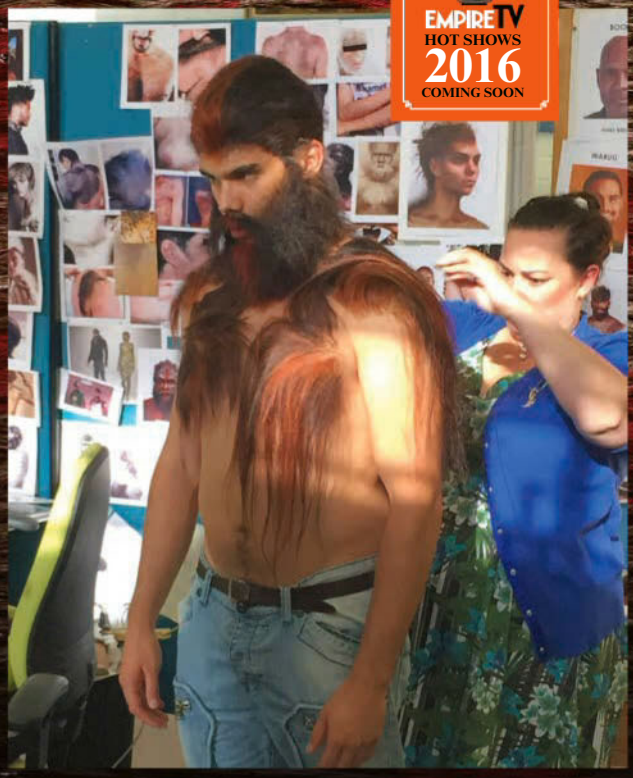
anyone has ever seen a show like this before." With a huge 80 per cent indigenous cast, director Wayne Blair (*The Sapphires*, *Redfern Now*) and *Lantana* actress Leah Purcell are taking on directing duties and a sprawling genre-bending plot fusing mad scientists, inter-dimensional monsters and mythical super powers. *Cleverman* promises to be unlike anything ever made by Aunty.

To bring these stories and the creatures within to life, the production team needed a visionary partner who could take these ancient stories and give them some razzle dazzle without losing their meaning, as Blight explains. "Kylie du Fresne [*Blight's partner at Goalpost Pictures*] and I went to L.A. thinking 'Let's go find a genre expert!' We went over planning to see Gale Ann Hurd [*executive producer of* The Walking Dead] but someone said to us 'Why are you looking this way? Why don't you look towards New Zealand and the Weta Creature Workshop?' So we went to New Zealand and met Richard Taylor who *is* the Weta Creature Workshop. He is an incredible man. Ryan and I went there and we had a conversation about what these stories meant, and he looked Ryan right in the eye and said 'I will do what I can to help you facilitate this.' They didn't want to make this their own. What they wanted to do was use their skill set to bring it to life," smiles Blight. "And I hope that's the beginning of a really long-standing relationship with them."

Weta's handiwork is pivotal to proceedings. *Cleverman* is set in a near future where creatures from ancient mythology, called the Hairypeople (or Hairies) have suddenly emerged and must co-exist with humans who treat them with thinly veiled hatred. Ghettoised into a block known as The Zone, the parallels between the Hairies and modern day Australia's treatment of Aboriginals is telling. In a novel twist, the Hairies only allies are those indigenous to this country.

When a series of violent, unexplained murders leaves bodies ripped apart, blame for the bloodshed is pointed firmly in the direction of the new evolutionary arrivals. One man killed is Uncle Jimmy (Jack Charles). Uncle Jimmy was the Cleverman, a chosen being who is the conduit between the Dreaming and this world. The Cleverman has the power to bring these dimensions back together and only he can see the true terror that lies behind these attacks.

The Cleverman of the title is steeped in indigenous folklore. As the show's designer Jake Nash (Bangarra Dance Theatre) describes, 'The Cleverman is passing down to the chosen. The Cleverman is not given to you, it chooses you. So it's sort of a strength and you have powers, and you're able to do things other people can't do. He's got ›



GETTING WIGGY WITH IT

HAIR AND MAKE-UP DESIGNER KATH BROWN EXPLAINS HOW SHE MAKES THE HAIRIES, ERM, HAIRY

Are the wigs real hair?
Yes. In fact, they're predominantly human hair, a little bit of mohair and yak as well, so we've covered a lot of our animals. The hair design we are aiming for is not fully animal, but animally.

How long does it take to make-up a Hairy?
It's an hour and a half for the main characters. We spend a little less time on the turnaround for the extras. Less time, but no less skill. So an hour and a half to set up, say about 20 minutes to half an hour or so to get out, and then there's that process of cleaning and setting up the wigs for next time.

Is it a pretty big task keeping the wigs in good shape?
Yes. It's quite time consuming making them, and the upkeep, because as it's on quite a delicate mesh and it's not strand by strand. Then obviously we have to glue them on to people and then remove them in the easiest way to protect the hair, then treat and set them up and clean them in such a way so they can last the run of the shoot. Certain things have to be replaced due to wear and tear. But that's a big part of the job, as well, basically keeping them nice.





Hairy Djukara (Tysan Towney) breaks loose.

connections to the past, present and future. He can go back in time. He's definitely got a special spirit."

The person the mantle is passed down to is Uncle Jimmy's nephew Koen (Hunter Page-Lochard). The Hairies and people of The Zone desperately need a leader but Koen does not want the responsibility. Koen's half-brother, Waruu (Rob Collins), is his antithesis. He believes himself to be the protector of his people and the natural heir to the Cleverman powers, the realisation that his heedless younger sibling has been chosen sends him into freefall.

"He's a very driven, ambitious character," explains the former *The Lion King* stage star (Collins played Mufasa in the Australian production). "And I think there's always a wonderful quality about that kind of person. Very focused and directed towards finding a better life for his people, but also clouded by his own quest for world domination. Quite easy to play really," says Collins, smiling. "I did offer to sing, but I was rejected," he laughs. "It still deals with the fantasy world, and I think the one commonality Waruu and Mufasa have is they're both leaders of a community, yet their journeys are starkly different."

The Zone itself, where the Hairies live, is a location scout's dream. The cavernous disused Suburban Car Workshop, where the Hairies have created their rural community, has seen better days. Full of disused carriages and trains, all covered in dirt, the environment that has been created is an amazing use of existing architecture. The living spaces the Hairies call home are dark and dingy. Old mattresses are lined up in small dark rooms where the Hairies squeeze into cramped confines to help keep themselves warm. There is a makeshift gym, a canteen, caravans and a medical centre. Working as a doctor in this throng is Charlotte Cleary (Frances O'Connor), a medic determined to help.

Cleary's husband Jarrod Slade (*Game Of Thrones* star Iain Glen) promises to be one of the show's most interesting characters. "He has tentacles spread far and wide," laughs Glen. "And I think he quite likes to be a hidden force. You're less inclined to know what he is up to. He's an inordinately wealthy businessman who is obviously involved in all areas of the media, in pharmaceuticals, real estate, so I think primarily he's a force for good. He uses his wealth for good, to benefit society. In that way he's visible. One of the things he's involved in is helping to fund a medical clinic that runs inside The Zone, that his wife works in for free."

Not that Slade is a do-gooder. "No, no it's not all good," he smirks with mock villainy. "In the sense that I think he has a greater goal, and negates the racial differences. The Hairies are in positions of power, physical power, a metaphysical insight that the humans are finding a threat. So he is trying to discover that difference, to try and scientifically extract that DNA, to try and share those powers. I think in many fields you can have that sort of greater goal that's good, but you can start doing slightly morally reprehensible things, in incremental ways as you move towards that goal, that you blind yourself to. I think that's the journey that Slade is on, so I think he could argue very well for why he is doing what he's doing, but I think if you take a cold, hard look at it, he's veered quite severely from his moral compass."

One of the characters blinded by Slade's power is Waruu says Collins, joining in on the conversation. "Slade offers Waruu this world of opportunity — money, wealth, power and opportunity to do a lot of things that have otherwise been impossible for him to do, and so they form this unlikely alliance. This is someone who has built an empire, and I think without knowing it, it's what Waruu wants to do in The Zone as well."

His work complete, Glen will soon be reunited with his Mother Of Dragons on the set of *Game Of Thrones*. The actor sees similarities between *Cleverman* and the show that made him very famous.

"The script is just a very unusual concoction, I don't think I'd read anything like it. There is a very stark reality to the story. It's a very harsh look



Koen (Hunter Page-Lochard) sits down with his Uncle Jimmy (Jack Charles).



Uncle Jimmy listens to Waruu (Rob Collins).



Charlotte Cleary (Frances O'Conner) shares a tender moment with her husband Jarrod Slade (Iain Glen).

at a society that is a dystopia, and not at ease with itself. And yet there is this sort of supernatural element in it. It's a very unusual juxtaposition. In some ways it reminds me of *Thrones*, in the sense that you have that really harsh reality. I think one of the reasons that *Thrones* is so successful is that you can imagine that life really was like that, you know. The way that society is structured feels plausible, so that kind of beds it in a kind of reality, and yet there is this other element where weird and wonderful things can happen. So in that sense there's a kind of overlap."

The scenes being shot today take place outsideThe Zone at the perimeter fence checkpoint. As three actors made up as Hairies keep themselves warm around a smoking oil can, anti-Hairy protesters are waving placards ('Hairy Scary!' 'No Rights For Hairies!' 'Keep Them Behind The Wall!'). Police, all wearing black armour, look on nervously, twitchy fingers holding onto their batons. The flashing lights of the police cars only add to the unease.

EmpireTV huddles against a wall as 'action!' is shouted, and drone cameras take to the sky. The protests get louder and the three young Hairies run into view, turn and flash their backsides at the police. Unsurprisingly, the lawmen do not take kindly to being mooned. As the youngsters scarper, shots are fired and one of the protesters tries to stop the police. He is punched to the floor and relentlessly kicked for his valiant efforts. As 'cut' is called, on-duty director Blair laughs."We shot their arses, now we need to get the other side."

As Blair preps for his reverse angle we chat with his co-director Purcell about how important this show will be for her community. "The responsibility we have, as indigenous directors, to these stories, and the indigenous elements that run through them, is huge. I hope that we've pulled up enough without breaking protocol, but we've given enough so that indigenous people can look up there and go 'Oh, that's us up there. Wow!' It's important to know that our stories from ancient times fit beautifully into this genre and can be developed."

"This has got to be the best history lesson ever," she adds laughing. "Sci-fi fans know their genre so we have to make sure that we dot all our Is and cross our Ts, otherwise there'll be complaints." Purcell laughs as she remembers that one of her producers is a card carrying fanboy. "As Ryan says, 'That's what we do! We sit there with remotes and whine!'"

***CLEVERMAN* IS OUT THIS YEAR ON ABC.**

COMING SOON — MAY



Bosch: S2

CREATOR **ERIC OVERMYER** / CAST **TITUS WELLIVER, JAMIE HECTOR, AMY AQUINO** / CATCH-UP **SBS, SBS ON DEMAND, ITUNES, GOOGLE PLAY** / FROM **MAY 4**

One of Amazon Studios' early hits returns, with the eponymous hard-bitten L.A detective with a gold-ish heart investigating the fallout of a Mob hit. This season is set to explore police corruption and domestic terrorism.

Follow The Money

CREATOR **JEPPE GJERVIG GRAM** / CAST **NIKOLAJ LIE KAAS, THOMAS BO LARSEN, NATALIE MADUENO** / CATCH-UP **SBS, SBS ON DEMAND** / FROM **MAY 12**

From the co-writer of political drama *Borgen*, this Danish thriller sees the discovery of a dead body near a wind farm connect two protagonists: a CEO (Lie Kass) and a detective (Bo Larsen) that are caught up in corruption within the world of green energy.

Hap And Leonard

CREATORS **NICK DAMICI, JIM MICKLE** / CAST **JAMES PUREFOY, MICHAEL K. WILLIAMS, CHRISTINA HENDRICKS** / CATCH-UP **SHOWCASE, FOXTEL GO, FOXTEL PLAY** / FROM **MAY 5**

Finally, character actor and serial scene stealer Michael K. Williams (*The Wire*, *Boardwalk Empire*) lands a starring role in this 1980s set buddy drama as Leonard, a gay Vietnam vet in a mire of trouble with his best friend, ex-con Hap (Purefoy).

Lucifer

CREATOR **TOM KAPINOS** / CAST **TOM ELLIS, LAUREN GERMAN, KEVIN ALEJANDRO** / CATCH-UP **FX, FOXTEL GO, FOXTEL PLAY** / FROM **MAY 4**

Another comic book character hits TV, this time Lucifer Morningstar (Ellis), the Dark Lord reimagined as a charming ladies man and L.A. vigilante which, if you're the Devil, creates quite the sticky moral quandary.

Marseille

CREATOR **DAN FRANCK** / CAST **GÉRARD DEPARDIEU, BENOÎT MAGIMEL, GÉRALDINE PAILHAS** / CATCH-UP **NETFLIX** / FROM **MAY 5**

The first original Netflix production from France, this is a French twist on *House Of Cards* set in the famous seaside city amidst a "Shakespearean theatre of politics".
Sound familiar?

Orphan Black: S4

CREATORS **GRAEME MANSON, JOHN FAWCETT** / CAST **TATIANA MASLANY, TATIANA MASLANY, TATIANA MASLANY** / CATCH-UP **SBS2, SBS ON DEMAND, ITUNES, GOOGLE PLAY** / FROM **MAY 10**

Fans of this labyrinthine sci-fi series will know that the above repetitive credit is no typo and well deserved, such is the mastery of Tatiana Maslany's performances as a litany of uniquely characterised clones which only get richer as each season passes.

Penny Dreadful: S3

CREATOR **JOHN LOGAN** / CAST **JOSH HARTNETT, TIMOTHY DALTON, EVA GREEN** / CATCH-UP **SHOWCASE, FOXTEL GO, FOXTEL PLAY** / FROM **MAY 4**

Literature's gothic anti-heroes – Dr Victor Frankenstein (Harry Treadaway) and Dorian Gray (Reeve Carney) among them – are back for another round of horror, this time with the addition of Dr Jekyll (Shazad Latif).

Rake: S4

CREATORS **PETER DUNCAN, RICHARD ROXBURGH, CHARLES WATERSTREET** / CAST **RICHARD ROXBURGH, DANIELLE CORMACK, RUSSELL DYKSTRA** / CATCH-UP **ABC, IVIEW, ITUNES, GOOGLE PLAY** / FROM **MAY TBC**

It's been a long time coming, but in Season 4 there'll be a major shake-up for Cleaver Greene (Roxburgh) who finds himself on the run and representing a former mentor turned crim (John Waters) who also happens to want him dead.

Shaun Micallef's Mad As Hell: S6

CREATOR **SHAUN MICALLEF** / CAST **SHAUN MICALLEF, FRANCIS GREENSLADE, EMILY TAHENY** / CATCH-UP **ABC, IVIEW, ITUNES, GOOGLE PLAY** / FROM **MAY TBC**

Multi-hyphenated talent Shaun Micallef and his cohorts have fashioned themselves a quirky, cutting niche in news satire over five seasons and the sixth promises more hilariously surreal skewering of the wacky world of current affairs.

The Spoils Before Dying

CREATORS **WILL FERRELL, MATT PIEDMONT** / CAST **MICHAEL KENNETH WILLIAMS, WILL FERRELL, KRISTEN WIIG** / CATCH-UP **SBS2, SBS ON DEMAND** / FROM **MAY TBC**

This spiritual sequel to Funny Or Die's retro miniseries pisstake *The Spoils Of Babylon* points its aim of over the top silliness at the film noir genre with Will Ferrell returning as buffoonish narrator Eric Jonrosh.



TAKING The MICK

A LONE SURVIVOR SETS OUT TO CAPTURE EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE BLACK HUMOURED OUTBACK SERIAL KILLER, MICK TAYLOR, AS HE TERRORISES THE SMALL SCREEN IN WOLF CREEK – A TELEVISION SERIES BASED ON THE POPULAR FILMS FROM THE CRACK CREATIVE TEAM BEHIND *UNDERBELLY*...

WORDS **JAMES JENNINGS**

Back to the shack: John Jarratt's hunter Mick Taylor becomes the hunted in new TV series *Wolf Creek*.



IN TERMS OF DREAD-inducing items to have delivered to you by Australia Post, a gory severed head in a cardboard box beats wads of junk mail and unwanted bills by a fairly large margin. The disturbingly life-like noggin may be made chiefly from latex — and be delicately packed with bubble-wrap begging for a good popping — but it doesn't stop the sight from being any less gruesome. The fact that a dead bird in a jar and a queasily familiar, giant-sized Bowie knife are also within view do nothing to detract from the — how do we put this delicately? — utter *pants-shittingness* of what's in *EmpireTV*'s line of sight.

Welcome, then, to the art department for *Wolf Creek*, a new television series from the makers of *Underbelly* (including director Tony Tilse and writers Peter Gawler and Felicity Packard), consisting of six one-hour episodes that delve further into the horrific tourist-dispensing hobby entertained by Outback serial killer Mick Taylor (as with the two *Wolf Creek* films, brought to chilling life here by John Jarratt). Although *Wolf Creek 1* and *2* writer-director Greg Mclean is on-board as executive producer (as well as having a hand in the story and directing the series' penultimate episode), there's a natural concern that by transferring to television, the property will lose its teeth: both in terms of cinematic scope and a toning down of tourist dicing violence. A watered down *Creek*, if you will.

"It can't be straight horror for six hours — it would become very wearying," says co-writer and producer Peter Gawler from the show's Adelaide Studios production offices. "It's more a thriller and we concentrate on the character of Eve [*Lucy Fry*] and her emotional and physical journey. We knew we would attract the horror fans, but we wanted to also attract a broader audience, so we knew it couldn't be as explicit as the movies. But there are horror elements — we're not shrinking away from them."

"I'm really sensitive so I don't watch a lot of horror, but I worked with Greg [*Mclean*] last year on a horror film called *The Darkness*, and I was watching *Wolf Creek* then, and it terrified me and I didn't want to get through it cos I'm such a wuss!" says Lucy Fry with a spirited laugh, fresh from showing us a burn mark on her leg she acquired from shooting an UZI the day prior ("Don't touch your skin with the end of an UZI after you've been shooting it — I learned that the hard way!"). Fry, best known for roles in *Mako: Island Of Secrets*, *Vampire Academy* and the upcoming Stephen King mini-series *11.22.63* opposite James Franco — may be a self-confessed wuss, but confirms she did manage to finally get through the film. "When I got the part I thought I'd better watch it all. Then when I met John for the first time I almost weed my pants! [*laughs*] I think he saw the fear in my eyes because he's been really nice to me since then."

Above: John Jarratt and Deborah Mailman shooting scenes at the Face Of The Madonna Fuel Stop And Cafe. **Right:** Mick prepares to take aim.



Mick Taylor holds court by the campfire with holidaying American, Eve Thorogood (Lucy Fry) and her family.

Fry has the lion's share of the show's scenes in her role as Eve Thorogood, a 19-year-old American tourist. "Eve was training to be an Olympic athlete, and she got addicted to painkillers, which is why she and her family are in Australia — to re-bond and help her recover," says Fry. "Mick kills the family, and because of Eve's Olympic training, and competitive spirit, she has the strength and an edge to fight back." The role has proven to be psychologically taxing ("For the first few weeks of filming I had really bad nightmares… it really got into my psyche.") as well as physically gruelling for the 23-year-old Queenslander. "It's very intense — it's definitely made me a lot stronger," says Fry. "In every situation, the stakes are so high."

Gawler is quick to sing Fry's praise when discussing the show's athletic leading lady. "Lucy is a revelation as Eve, she's just throwing herself into it, and it's a really physical performance," he enthuses. "You should see her with a gun in a hand!" "The first gun Eve gets is a little Colt pistol, and it's a lovely little ladies gun," laughs Fry later on in her hotel room. "At first it was really awkward — I didn't know where the magazine went or how to turn the safety on and off, and then it becomes second nature. I'm kind of grateful for it because it's probably a really good skill to learn for self-defence..."

A TOUR OF THE SET FOR MICK

Taylor's shed/living quarters is all the motivation one would need to bone-up on their self-defence skills. The spartan space has the basics — a bed, a fridge — and several 'extras' that would have any visiting Jehovah's Witnesses bolting: various knives and tools that appear to be used for grisly tasks they're not necessarily designed for, plus a wall lined with cameras, passports and other assorted ephemera taken from victims. There's also a huge cage equipped with restraints — not the kind of feature you'd find being endorsed on, say, John Jarratt's former TV show *Better Homes And Gardens*.

Other sets housed within the innards of Adelaide Studios include a huge collapsible barn and a full-sized rustic farmhouse that has been rigged to burn to a cinder (a job being overseen by flown in special effects experts). Outside are a fleet of assorted vehicles: an old caravan, a huge Winnebago decorated with mini US flags, a correctional facilities van and a burnt out jeep. In terms of scale and action sequences, it's apparent that *Wolf Creek* — the first locally commissioned Australian drama for SVOD service Stan — aims to be just as cinematic and spectacular as its film cousins.

"We made a real effort to tell the story visually — we don't have reams of exposition and really chatty dialogue," says Gawler. "It's like a John Ford Western, where he famously took the script and just ripped pages out — to some extent we have been doing that. And we've been blessed with a genius DOP, Geoffrey Hall [*Chopper*, *Red Dog*, *ANZAC Girls*], who really knows how to shoot the landscape." As with the films, the Australian Outback plays a major role in the series. "We wanted that cinematic style and for it to look and feel like six little movies end on end — that was the plan," continues Gawler. "The location has an impact on Eve, too, because it's a hostile environment and initially it's her enemy. But by the time her journey is complete she is one with the landscape — she's like Mick." "It is really intense but it's great because I can really use it," Fry adds later. "It's tiring, but I can use that for what Eve's going through so I kind of love it, being out in those harsh elements. I get up and think 'how am I going to get through this day?'… and that's what she's doing too."

As he is during the events portrayed in the *Wolf Creek* television series, Mick Taylor has so far proven an elusive presence during our South Australian set visit. To track down the dark alter ego of John Jarratt, *EmpireTV* is going to have to go bush — 43km north-west of Adelaide, to be precise — to the locality of Port Gawler where a man and his imposing muttonchops await us… ›



SITTING AS A WEATHERED

beacon of hope — at least for those looking for a bathroom and a cheap sandwich — amid the dust, heat and flies of Port Gawler is the Face Of The Madonna Fuel Stop And Café, so named in the *Wolf Creek* universe because the fictional outpost's original owner claimed to have once seen the face of the Virgin Mary in the women's bathroom. The owner's daughter — Bernadette, played in the show by Deborah Mailman — now runs the café, which acts as a central meeting point through which all of the main characters will pass. As Mailman paces outside and the film crew preps inside, we are approached by a police officer — or, to be more accurate, an actor dressed as a police officer.

"I'm used to the heat and the dust and the flies," says Dustin Clare, in uniform as Det. Sgt. Sullivan Hill, a Northern Territory cop who helps Eve track down Mick. "One of my first jobs out of drama school was *McLeod's Daughters*, which was shot just up the road from here." Clare even credits the extreme weather conditions for bringing the cast and crew closer together. "There's a real sense of teamwork – I don't think I've come across it so intensely before," he muses. "Everyone's working really hard because we believe we're making something quite good and surprising, and I haven't felt like that working on Australian TV for a long time. Tony Tilse and Geoffrey Hall are trying to push the boundaries of what Australian TV is. From what I'm seeing back from the rushes, the show has a real Western feel, which you may not expect."

Soon we're whisked off to a trailer as a proud member of the art department shows off a fake gangrenous arm rigged to spurt blood once the hand is sawn off. Sitting at the far end of the trailer in a blue truckie singlet having his make-up done is John Jarratt, clearly in a playful mood: he yells "BOO!" at a make-up artist who is inches from his face, scaring her half to death. It's clear where Mick Taylor's larrikin humour comes from — the burly man who has been playing the character for the better part of 11 years.

"When Greg rang me he said 'we're gonna make a six-part TV series', and I thought 'this is getting a bit gratuitous, isn't it?'," admits Jarratt 15 minutes later, now dressed in Mick Taylor's signature work jeans and blood red flannelette shirt. "Then I got the scripts and was surprisingly pleased — I think they're really good and I think people will love it." The series, Jarratt is quick to point out, is still a different beast to the films. "It's obviously more episodic, and it's a six-hour journey of this young woman that's out for revenge in a Charles Bronson kind of way."

Now 63, Jarratt admits that physically the role is beginning to take its toll. "Mate, I have to work out three times a week! Look at this [*shows off a bulging bicep*]. I had to work out this morning with this amazing guy who's got muscles on his breath! He trains the life out of me, almost kills me. How long can you keep that up? That's the problem." Although Mick's reign of terror may end soon, Jarratt reveals that audiences should still expect at least one more film. "We are gonna do *Wolf Creek 3* — probably at the end of this year. And I think that'll just about do it because Mick's not going to look good with a walking frame, y'know? I don't know how long I can keep up the smoke and mirrors!"

Jarratt believes the Mick's popularity stems from his humour and "'fuck you' attitude. He's scarily likeable — you can't help liking the bastard." The actor says he hears Mick references from the public "every three feet": "'Do the laugh!', "Hello Mick!'. I call it the 'Norman Gunston Syndrome', Garry [*McDonald*] had to live through it and he became Norman for a long time, and I'm going to be Mick for a long time, I suspect. It's a double-edged sword. It puts producers off — if they put me in their movie they'll think it's Mick Taylor – so it's good and bad. If you do something well, the downside is that's all you're known for."

Above: Det. Sgt. Sullivan Hill (Dustin Clare) on the trail of Mick Taylor.
Top right: Eve, grab your gun.
Bottom right: Mick, eating out. Probably not a McRib.





Just as he begins to explain how easy it is to slip in and out of character, an actor inadvertently interrupts our conversation, giving Jarratt — a garrulous, funny and well-liked presence on set — the chance to flash a that famous Mick Taylor blend of humour and menace. "I'm doin' an interview digger!" he says to peals of laughter from assembled crew. "I'll take it a bit far and leap across the fucken table, I'll be into you in a minute!" More laughter, before he turns his attention back to *EmpireTV*. "Now what was the question before he so rudely interrupted me? Oh yeah, getting into character, just like that [*snaps fingers*]. Like I nearly did with him."

As he leaves to shoot a scene with Mailman, Jarratt posits that perhaps Mick — a character he clearly has a ball playing — may continue beyond a third film. "I suppose we could do *Wolf Creek 4* with Mick in one of those motorised buggies seniors use, put a rack and some spotlights on one of those. The opening could be Mick rattling along the footpath, and he turns left and goes into this place, and you tilt up and see a sign that says 'Outback Old Peoples' Home', and he's goin' in there to take 'em all out, because they're the only ones he can catch…"

***WOLF CREEK* PREMIERES ON STAN MAY 12.**

COMING SOON — JUNE



Garfunkel and Oates

CREATORS **RIKI LINDHOME, KATE MICUCCI** / CAST **RIKI LINDHOME, KATE MICUCCI** / CATCH-UP **SBS2, SBS ON DEMAND** / FROM **JUNE TBC**

Follows the misadventures of cult comedy-folk duo Garfunkel (Lindhome) and Oates (Micucci), described by *The Wall Street Journal* as "the female Flight Of the Conchords."

Power: S3

CREATOR **COURTNEY KEMP AGBOH** / CAST **OMARI HARDWICK, NATURI NAUGHTON, CURTIS JACKSON** / CATCH-UP **STAN, ITUNES, GOOGLE PLAY** / FROM **JUNE TBC**

From Executive Producer Curtis '50 Cent' Jackson (who also stars), this crime drama centres on James 'Ghost' St. Patrick, owner of glamorous New York nightclub Truth, a front for a lucrative drug network.

Roadies

CREATOR **CAMERON CROWE** / CAST **LUKE WILSON, CARLA GUGINO, IMOGEN POOTS** / CATCH-UP **STAN** / FROM **JUNE 26**

Cameron Crowe (*Almost Famous*) returns to the music world with this look at roadies and the rock bands they elevate. Characters and events are based on true stories, including the time Freddie Mercury flipped out when he discovered fingerprints on his piano.

Turn: Washington's Spies: S3

CREATOR **CRAIG SILVERSTEIN** / CAST **JAMIE BELL, ANGUS MACFADYEN, DANIEL HENSHALL** / CATCH-UP **SHOWCASE, FOXTEL GO, FOXTEL PLAY, ITUNES, GOOGLE PLAY** / FROM **JUNE 16**

AMC's revolutionary war espionage thriller ups the ante this season with events leading to a notorious flashpoint in American history – the defection to the British of Benedict Arnold (Owain Yeoman).

UnREAL: S2

CREATORS **MARTI NOXON, SARAH GERTRUDE SHAPIRO** / CAST **SHIRI APPLEBY, CONSTANCE ZIMMER, CRAIG BIERKO / CATCH-UP STAN** / FROM **JUNE TBC**

One of the breakout hits of 2015, *UnREAL* was the fictional show that finally shanked reality TV in its cold, dead heart. This season will be even more subversive with the casting of a black suitor for the *Bachelor*-esque show *Everlasting*, pipping real reality TV to the post.



Whatever Happened to Jane & Lily?

Odd couple title stars of Netflix's *Grace And Frankie*, Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin talk success and (not) growing old gracefully

WORDS **SIMON BRAUND**

WITH A TYPICALLY audacious bid to harness the untapped oldie crowd, Netflix scored a cross-generational hit with serio-comic sitcom *Grace And Frankie*, Season 1 of which has been streaming since last May. Taking titular top billing, Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin (last seen together in 1980's *9 To 5* with Dolly Parton), play women of advancing years who have been bitter rivals for decades, despite their husbands Sol and Robert (Sam Waterston and Martin Sheen) sharing an inversely close, equally long-standing business partnership.

What starts this delicious ball of comedy gold rolling is the revelation that Sol and Robert have been lovers for 20 years and are planning a big, fat, gay wedding. It's a late-in-life bombshell that forces Grace and Frankie, polar opposites in both spirit and temperament, into an uneasy but unavoidable alliance. *EmpireTV* spoke to Fonda and Tomlin shortly after a second season of *Grace And Frankie* got the green light.







Never too old: Grace (Jane Fonda) reconstituting a melon; Sol (Sam Waterston) and Robert (Martin Sheen) finding true love; Frankie (Lily Tomlin) takes the Rorschach test. Or something.

Describe the audience reaction to the show?
JANE FONDA: Well, the whole of Season 1 was released on a Thursday. The next morning, Friday, I was getting calls and emails from friends who had already watched the whole season! That was a revolutionary experience. I hear from people that their college kids are watching it; grandchildren are watching it with their grandparents. The most common reaction I get is older women saying, 'Thank you, you've given me hope. My husband just left me and you saved my life.' That makes me feel very good.

What are your thoughts on the adage "Life begins at 50"?
JF: I can't remember 50, that was too long ago [*laughs*]. But my seventies have been pretty good. It's one of the reasons the show has been so successful, it gives people hope. Seventy is when things really started to happen for me — knowing what to look for in a partner, having a steady job. Being 78 and having a steady job, I love it.
LILY TOMLIN: I had enough adventure when I was 18. And I didn't even go to juvie. I think I had a pretty good time, but I don't even remember which room I'm in here at the hotel. I don't cling to the past. But making a TV show is an adventure.

Talking of good times, there's a scene in the show where you two do peyote. Did that take any special preparation?
LT: Well, we usually do peyote every Friday night so they just called the crew in a little later.
JF: We were on the beach and the tide came in. We were in the middle of the scene, talking to each other, and suddenly we were under water.

Was that a chance to reminisce about the old days?
LT: I didn't have old days like that. I learnt all about it from Jane.
JF: I taught her everything I know.

You have been friends for a long time. Do you feel you have a special bond?
JF: We do. I love being with her for all kinds of reasons, but especially because she has a true funny bone. I come from a long line of depressives, so to go to work every day with someone whose take on everything comes from funny is fabulous.
LT: Then why do you give me that blank look, like you don't know what I'm talking about.
JF: Because I *don't* know what you're talking about. I'm so lacking in humour I think everything's serious. She brings me out of that. We have a good time together, and we do have a history.
LT: I think I can testify to that convincingly because I had a *Klute* hairdo for three years.
JF: And that's the only proof you'll ever get that she likes me. I'm much more substantive.

What were your initial reactions to the scripts?
LT: I thought it'd be a great adventure.
JF: It started with Marta [*Kauffman, executive producer*] meeting with me and Lily and giving us the basics of it. It was good enough for us both to say, 'Yeah, this could have potential.' I think we only got one script, and I was worried that we weren't quite finding the fine line between serious and funny. I think the audience recognised the show's voice before we knew we'd settled on one.

What exactly were you unsure about?
JF: I wasn't sure whether the serious aspects would work, whether the jokes would land, whether there was enough of one or too much of the other. And it's hard to be the straight man. I felt really boring [*laughs*].

Did you take particular steps to deal with that?
JF: I hired an acting coach. That's the extent to which I was insecure, and I sat down with her and we watched every episode of Season 1 together before it came out. It was a revelation.

Just backing up a second — *you*, Jane Fonda felt the need to hire an acting coach?
JF: Yeah, I did. First of all, one of the reasons, for me anyway, is that being an actor is not like being a painter, where you have a canvass and a brush, or being a musician, where you have an instrument. As actors, *we* are the instrument. And as a human being you can get blocked because of something in your life; sometimes things just don't flow right.

How many people have asked you whether Dolly Parton is going to guest star?
LT: Yeah, we'd love to have Dolly, just for the fun of it. We can think of an idea.
JF: We already have. We just have to convince Marta.

What's the secret of aging with grace and gusto?
JF: Health and attitude.
LT: Denial.

***GRACE AND FRANKIE* S2 WILL BE ON NETFLIX ON MAY 2.**


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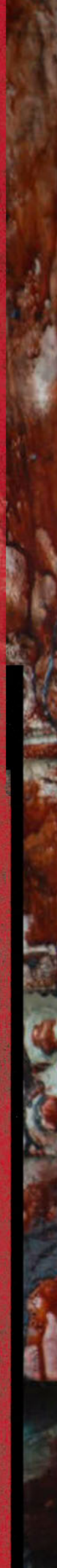


OLD FAVOURITES FIND NEW LIFE. A NEW POSSE OF GIANT STARS MAKE THE MOVE TO THE SMALL SCREEN. AND WE EXAMINE THE WALKING DEAD'S CONTINUED WORLD-BEATING SUCCESS. STREAMED, CABLE OR FREE-TO-AIR, GET READY TO WATCH NOW...

EmpireTV **heads to the heart of the zombie apocalypse in Georgia to investigate the TV phenomenon that is *The Walking Dead* and how it is that, after 83 episodes, its flesh-craving undead are...**

Still Walking

WORDS **JOHN NAUGHTON**





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The *Walking Dead*

gift shop in Senoia, Georgia, is thronged. The Blue Knights motorcycle club, all leather waistcoats, muscular shoulders and five o'clock shadows, has recently rolled into the small town and made a beeline for the store, situated a short zombie stagger up the hill from the Alexandria set where Season 6 is currently shooting. All things Daryl Dixon, *The Walking Dead*'s embodiment of this particular demographic, are flying off the shelves, while groups of bandana-wearing gentlemen crowd around one of Daryl's motorbikes, taking selfies. On everything from model crossbows to mousemats, Norman Reedus's narrowed eyes glare out above the legend, "Everyone makes fun of the redneck. Until the zombie apocalypse."

It's a statement which also speaks of the show's hard-headed individualism, which has come to reflect back the spirit of the Deep South, where it's filmed. This is a show which was rejected by an established network, NBC, and picked up by then brash upstart AMC. This is a show that ditched its big-name creatives and burned through showrunners, a show that has survived and thrived on financial cutbacks, a show that has been seen both as to the right of Charlton Heston and a haven for bedwetting liberals. It is, in short, for everybody.

At the unlikely nexus where soap opera intersects with *The Moral Maze* and *28 Days Later*…, this is a show which has snagged more adult cable viewers than any other in the States: the Season 5 premiere drew 17.3 million viewers alone. It is in equal parts a bloodthirsty, skull-popping, gun-toting terrorfest, a meditation on democracy and a foundation myth for the *Call Of Duty* generation. Though some in the Seven Kingdoms might remonstrate, this is the most-watched cable drama in the Western World.

Look for reasons to

explain this phenomenal success and you swiftly realise they are manifold, even contradictory. But Andrew Lincoln — aka erstwhile sheriff Rick Grimes, a battle-hardened survivor of innumerable violent clashes with both the living and the undead — believes *The Walking Dead*'s appeal is simple: empathy. "I hope it's that everyone has their own favourite character that they identify with and root for," says the 42-year-old Londoner, his American drawl still intact. He's sceptical, however, about whether there's something else going on, if *The Walking Dead* works because it represents the modern world. "Our job is just to tell a really cool story," he reasons. "The moment you get into metaphor you sound really pretentious and that's something I'm allergic to."

Reflecting the leadership dilemma playing out in Alexandria in Seasons 5 and 6, Tovah Feldshuh, aka former senator and the beleagured town's matriarch Deanna Monroe, begs to differ. "The walkers are not walkers," argues the veteran of TV, film and Broadway. "The walkers are ISIS, the walkers are Ebola, the walkers are AIDS and terminal cancer. It's like Bruno Bettelheim, the psychologist who wrote about our need for nightmares to process our fears, [*says*]: it has to come out of you and you have to see it. This series gives us an opportunity to process fear without direct bodily harm."

The Walking Dead's wider cultural influence is not difficult to spot. It was confirmed by a bizarre rant in April 2015 by right-wing commentator Glenn Beck, denouncing Americans who were prepared to watch executions on the show but not on ISIS videos. Even the more pragmatic Lincoln accepts that world affairs might have contributed to the show's success.

"You can't avoid fear at the moment," he acknowledges. "We're sold fear every day. That's how people make a lot of money, selling fear, that's what we do. That's what the media does. So it's in the air. We're telling a very scary story but it's about survival and, ultimately, it's about hope."

When Lincoln was first

cast as Rick back in 2010, he was best known as Egg in *This Life*, or the best man in *Love Actually* who secretly yearned for his mate's bride, Keira Knightley. You couldn't have imagined that he would fit the role of the steel-hard, colt-firing, machete-wielding Grimes so perfectly, yet the casting team of Sharon Bialy and Sherry Thomas saw what we couldn't have, and their brilliant and inventive matching of actors to roles has sustained the show ever since.

British performers like Lincoln, Lennie James (Morgan) and David Morrissey (The Governor) — not to ›

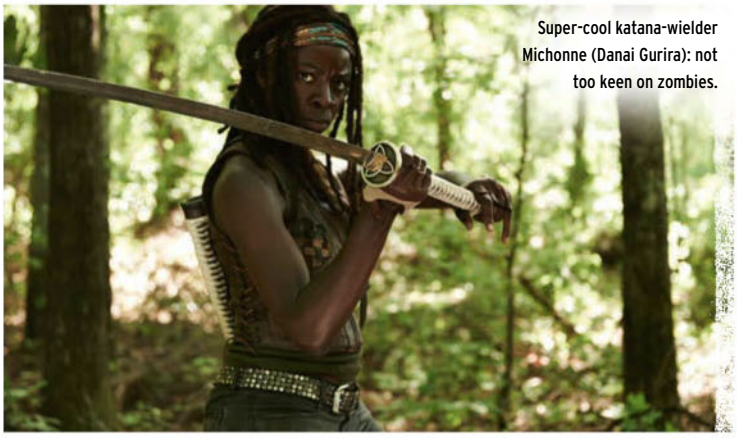


Here: Daryl (Norman Reedus) inside the compound of Alexandria in Season 6.
Below: Facing more peril in the premiere of Season 3.



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"You never know what's around the corner. It's just like real life." Norman Reedus



Super-cool katana-wielder Michonne (Danai Gurira): not too keen on zombies.



Sasha (Sonequa Martin-Green), with newly developed death wish after tragedy struck in Season 5.



Andrew Lincoln's Sheriff Rick Grimes, face to face with a wall of imprisoned walkers in Season 4.

mention Lauren Cohan (Maggie Greene), who moved to the UK aged 13 — have been used imaginatively and effectively (i.e. not only as villains). Most of all, having cast Michael Rooker as the racist redneck, Merle, the show saw the potential in Norman Reedus and created a role for him as Merle's brother, Daryl.

Despite being the breakout star of the show, Reedus plays down any notion that his sharp cheekbones (he was a former Prada model) and the straight-talking but sympathetic qualities of Daryl might have contributed hugely to its success. Pressed to give a reason why his character in particular has resonated so strongly with fans, provoking a craze for "If Daryl dies we riot" T-shirts among other outpourings of love, Reedus carefully deliberates and then, with a taciturnity of which his character would undoubtedly approve, declares, "He's not trying to bullshit you and he's definitely not judging you."

Reedus prefers to emphasise the show's sense of community — one that's only strengthened by the dire situation of its inhabitants. "It's an extraordinary world but it's filled with very ordinary people fighting to survive," he says. "It's a world without prejudice. It's a world without selfies and cell phones, hierarchies of money, a world where your word means something. You're judged not on where you come from or what you have or what you look like, but on what you will fight for. And in a world that's not like that, or very rarely like that, it's an escape from bullshit and you can live vicariously through these people who have each other's backs." It is strangely, perversely aspirational.

"We're sold fear every day. But this is about survival." **Andrew Lincoln**

Reedus also sees its appeal as rooted in the intensity of the jeopardy the members of that on-screen community face; they only become more beloved because we realise our time with them is precious. "You never know what's around the corner, it's just like real life," he says.

New arrivals on the show will note that there have already been over 250 cast members in six seasons. Bialy and Thomas might be able to offer great roles, but longevity is something they can't guarantee.

"Everybody knows if you've been hired from the third year onwards, you've come here to die," smiles Michael Cudlitz, who plays G.I. Abraham Ford, while Josh McDermitt, better known as the mullet-headed Eugene, reveals, "There are some members of the cast who when we go out for dinner, that's all they talk about. 'Oh my God, when am I gonna die, when am I gonna die?'"

It's not just the living

characters who are offed with such remarkable regularity and creativity. Underpinning both the show's appeal to hardcore fans of the comic and the more casual viewer are its zombies — sorry, 'walkers' — and the endlessly inventive ways they are introduced and dispatched.

The man most responsible for this is FX supremo Greg Nicotero (also director of over a dozen episodes to date), who learnt his craft from zombie godfather George A. Romero. A horror fan to his core — as a child he and his brother used to terrify themselves with trips to the morgue at the Pittsburgh hospital where his father worked as a doctor — Nicotero fizzes with excitement when describing innovative zombie destruction.

For a scene where a walker was hit by a car, he recalls hiring a contortionist to wrap their body around the wheel before adding "40 feet of intestines" around the axle. The show regularly employs amputees as zombies to create ›

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Weapons Of Messy Destruction

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO KILL A ZOMBIE... *EMPIRETV* PRESENTS *THE WALKING DEAD'S* ULTIMATE UNDEAD-ENDERS

ILLUSTRATION **BILL McCONKEY**



similarly striking effects.

"People look at me when I describe stuff like this and say, 'What is wrong with you?'" he laughs. "And I'm like, 'No, I just take what's on the page and I elevate it because I want to make sure that we're not doing the same thing over and over again.'"

While the execution of the zombie threat is clearly pivotal to the show's success, Nicotero is in no doubt who has done most, in recent years at least, to take the show to its current position of dominance.

"Scott Gimple, for sure. Scott has a unique vision. He's a comic book guy at heart and he respects the source material but I really feel since he took over as showrunner in Season 4, the show has improved in quality tremendously."

Gimple had worked on shows like *Life*, *Drive* and *FlashForward*, and co-wrote the movie *Ghost Rider: Spirit Of Vengeance* before joining *The Walking Dead* crew in 2011 as a producer and writer. The show was a hit from the outset, but the quality of storylines, writing and the story arcs, particularly of female characters like Carol (Melissa McBride) and Michonne (Danai Gurira), have all improved since he took over at the start of the fourth season.

But the road to Gimple's accession was, like many a path on the show itself, not without its casualties. That it weathered so many storms before his arrival can be put down to the strength and endurance of its creator's vision.

In 2003, aged 24, comic

book obsessive Robert Kirkman began writing *The Walking Dead*. Four years previously, he'd started his own publishing company, Funk-O-Tron, where he'd published *Battle Pope*, about a boozy, demon-hunting pontiff, but in 2002 indie publisher Image Comics hired him. His bosses there weren't impressed initially with another zombie strip, so he spun them a yarn about the undead being controlled by aliens and they went for it. A very smart white lie. Twelve years later there have been 150 issues with sales in the millions. Kirkman's creativity and productivity have underpinned the show's success to date. He's provided both a healthy fanbase and a bountiful supply of storylines and characters. Six series in and the TV show is still barely at the two-thirds point of the comic's existing universe. We are only just now coming to the arrival of the comic's übervillain, Negan, who in the form of Jeffrey Dean Morgan will dominate the remainder of Season 6. ("There's going to be a fight," promises Reedus. "I won't tell you who, when and where, but I can promise you a fight. All of us are about to clash with that motherfucker. There's a lot of turmoil in the second half of Season 6.")

When Kirkman's business partner David Alpert began offering the series to television, NBC held the option but ultimately passed, although as a network channel, it would never have stomached the necessary level of violence. More surprisingly, HBO also declined because the show's producers would not meet its request to tone down the violence. AMC, new to original programming and on a hot streak with *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad*, gave the show the greenlight and it launched with a series of six episodes, the first premiering on Hallowe'en night, 2010.

With acclaimed director Frank Darabont in creative control, critics noted the movie-quality production values and the zombie apocalypse drama was an instant success. But there was soon blood on the carpet behind, as well as in front of, the camera. First, AMC demanded that the second season deliver 13 episodes for less money than the original six of Season 1, then to the surprise of cast and crew, Darabont left mid-season (this remains the subject of a multi-million-dollar lawsuit), replaced in the short term by Kirkman, then by Glen Mazzara. Unsurprisingly, Season 2 was a disappointment to most fans, the show's initial drive dissipating as the gang holed up at Hershel's farm. Crucially, however, ratings continued to climb. Despite this, showrunner Mazzara also foundered by the end of Season 3.

Where the truth lies about these departures is moot, but *The Walking Dead* bears out Harry Lime's famous line about conflict breeding creativity. The numbers rose and the show's transformation from genre favourite to the mainstream mega-hit was complete. Scott Gimple took over and a degree of harmony between the showrunner and creator was achieved. And the ratings continued to grow, to an unprecedented and previously unimaginable point where, as exec producer Gale Anne Hurd puts it, "We're bigger than *Sunday Night Football*."

Whatever other factors

have contributed to its success, *The Walking Dead* certainly has the gift of making the best of whatever hand it's dealt. Georgia was chosen as the filming



Daryl and Carol (Melissa McBride) on guard in Season 6.



The small matter of being dead will not stop the walkers.



Rick and his son Carl (Chandler Riggs) take extreme measures – zombie guts – to dodge the walkers in Season 6.

"People look at me and say, 'What is wrong with you?!'"

Greg Nicotero, special effects make-up



Grimes goes full hipster in early Season 6.

location for tax-break reasons, yet its densely forested landscape, both vast and claustrophobic, have fed in beautifully to the show's atmosphere of dread. Meanwhile, Andrew Lincoln has grown into both the role and his position as the cast's unofficial team leader.

"Andy's the driving force behind this show," confirms Reedus. "He's the quarterback of this football team. I call him 'Andy Panda' and we have a little 'love you, fuck you' thing going on. If we're in a serious scene and we're together, I'll whisper in his ear, 'Fuck you,' and he'll come back, 'No, fuck you,' and we kind of throw those things at each other. It's funny 'cause Andrew is very diplomatic — he has a lot of couth, as they say, and I do not. If I don't like something I start tipping tables over and he's like, 'Norman, relax, let me handle this.'"

So maybe this is the final reason. Seventy-five episodes in, with the ever-present threat of death-by-zombie all around, battling sweltering heat, keeping spoilers at bay, whispering sweet nothings in each other's ears, there's a palpable sense that the cast and crew wouldn't have it any other way. It's the end of the world as we know it, and they feel fine.

***THE WALKING DEAD* IS SCREENING ON FX NOW.**

EMPIRETV HOT SHOWS 2016 OUT NOW

The Devil Zone

THE WALKING DEAD CREATOR ROBERT KIRKMAN HAS A NEW SHOW COMING, WHICH PROMISES TO DO FOR DEMONS WHAT HIS FIRST ONE'S DONE FOR ZOMBIES



HAVING COME UP WITH ONE WORLD-CONQUERING FORMULA, ROBERT Kirkman is hoping to repeat the feat with a very different kind of horror series. Shooting in and around the small southern town of Rock Hill, exorcism drama *Outcast* is the latest comic book adaptation from the creator of *The Walking Dead*. It sees Patrick Fugit (*Almost Famous*) as the disturbed Kyle Barnes, whose life has been plagued by demonic possession in those close to him. Reluctantly, as he tries to trace a path back to normality, he finds himself partnered with Reverend Anderson (*Life On Mars*' Philip Glenister), a lifelong demon-hunter who is starting to question his own powers.

Ridiculously busy with both these shows and their comic books, as well as *Walking Dead* spin-off *Fear The Walking Dead*, Kirkman isn't on set when *EmpireTV* visits, but this is still very much his baby. "Our inspiration is the comics," explains executive producer Chris Black, whose CV is littered with hits ranging from *Ugly Betty* to *Mad Men*. "It's Robert's vision, Robert's take. His mantra for the show is this: don't think of it as a horror show, think of it as a character show with horrific elements."

Wrenn Schmidt, who plays Kyle's adoptive sister, Megan, explains the show's inspiration. "Robert was saying to us that exorcism in film was always dealt with on a one-case basis: 'Somebody's possessed! Let's exorcise them! Awesome! We're done here, case solved, case closed.' And he said even that's only been done well a few times. What if it's something that recurs and needs to be dealt with on a larger scale. What does that look like?"

Unsurprisingly, Kirkman's stock is high in these parts, with cast and crew daring to hope that his ability to riff on a familiar movie theme and transform it into TV gold will pay off once again. Having missed out on *The Walking Dead*, HBO, in the form of its subsidiary Cinemax, didn't delay in commissioning the series.

"The source material is so great," enthuses Black. "If you look at shows like *The Walking Dead* and *Game Of Thrones* there's one vision behind them, one storyteller who knows where they are going."

Said storyteller in *Outcast*'s case has also been very clear in the direction he's given at least one cast member.

"The one thing he said to me was, 'Don't fuck it up!'" laughs Patrick Fugit. "'I'm planning on seven years of this, so don't fuck it up!' That's Robert being enthusiastic..."

***OUTCAST* IS COMING TO FX LATER THIS YEAR.**



AN UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENT

WILL ARNETT AND MITCH HURWITZ REUNITE FOR NETFLIX'S NEW SERIO-COMEDY *FLAKED*

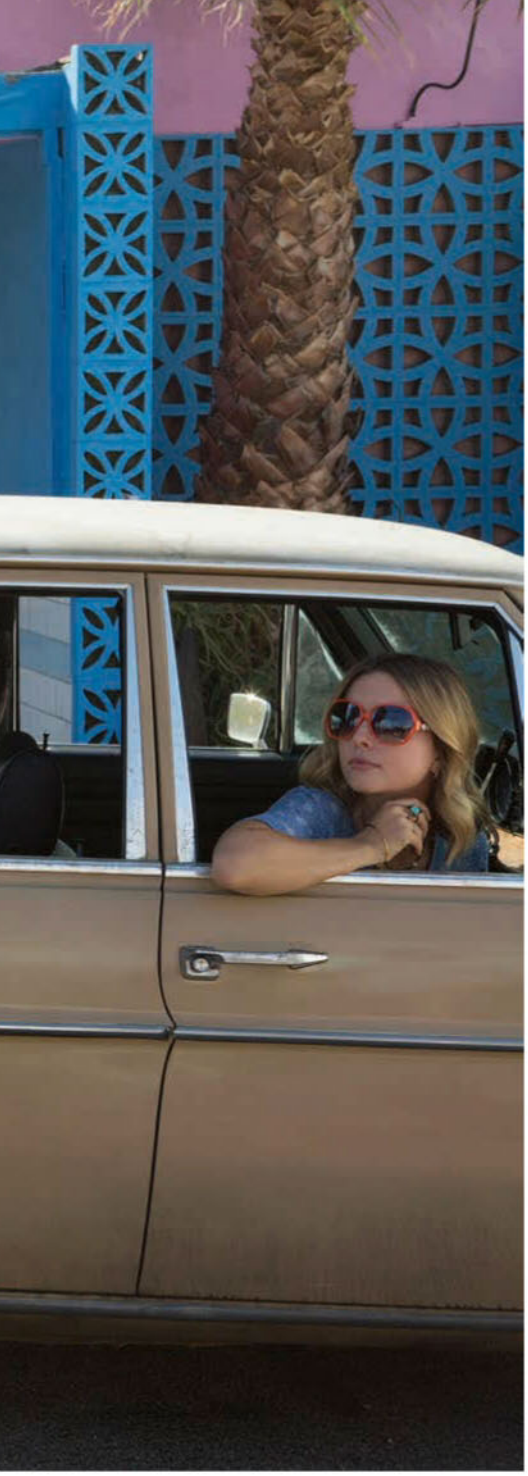
IF ***ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT*** — yes, even the somewhat patchy fourth season — taught us anything, it's that if you throw Will Arnett (who played Gob Bluth) and Mitchell Hurwitz (who created the show) together, laughs are pretty much guaranteed. Even their short-lived Fox sitcom, *Running Wilde*, had its moments. So their reunion on new Netflix show *Flaked* is surely a cause for celebration. Polish those funny bones, people, you're going to need them.

"This show's been much more dramatic than anything I've ever done," says Arnett. Wait, what? "*Flaked* is not just a lighthearted comedy," adds co-star Ruth Kearney. "There's also this sad and serious backdrop." Huh? What gives? Did we tell people to polish their funny bones for nothing?

Turns out that although *Flaked* is a comedy, it's 'serio-comic', and Arnett and Hurwitz had loftier goals than making a complex laughfest. "We wanted to reflect how we use comedy in our real lives," says Arnett. "There's a certain drama that we all carry within us in our lives."

Arnett, who co-created and co-wrote the show with Mark Chappell (Hurwitz serves here as executive producer), plays Chip, a furniture-store owner and self-confessed guru who gets tangled in a web of lies. "He's like an unofficial mayor of Venice, he knows everybody, and everybody loves him." Arnett used to live in the famously ramshackle

Flaked's creator, writer and star: Will Arnett as Chip in the new Netflix comedy-drama.



L.A.neighbourhood. “It’s changed a lot since I moved there 15 years ago,” he adds. “Venice is all about reinvention, and the show is about that: reinvention and change.”

Over *Flaked’s* eight binge-ready episodes, Chip’s world will unravel in a whirlwind of intrigue, deceit and baggage from his less-than-pristine past. There will be opportunities for change, plenty of reinvention, and an honest-to-goodness plot driving things along. “With *Arrested Development*, there was always a bigger story,” says Arnett. “The jokes here aren’t just throwaway bullshit. They’re about something. I think ultimately that’s what people will always really want — a real story.” **EVE BARLOW**

***FLAKED* IS ON NETFLIX NOW.**



11.22.63

JAMES FRANCO IS BOTH A TIME-TRAVELLING TEACHER AND CO-DIRECTOR IN THIS QUALITY STEPHEN KING ADAPTATION

THE STAR OF *OZ* *The Great And Powerful*, *127 Hours* and *Spring Breakers* is the kind of film star whose celebrity actually transcends his work. James Franco is best known for being James Franco, sly hunk and actor with occasionally freakish chops. His move into streaming TV is courtesy of Hulu in the US, Stan here in Australia, starring in *11.22.63*, adapted from the Stephen King thriller and produced by J.J. Abrams about a teacher, Jake Epping, who is shown a portal to time travel back to the 1960s, charged with the notion of stopping the JFK assassination. It’s handsomely made and thoroughly involving. Here, Franco tells us why and how he came to be involved, on both sides of the camera.

Why do you think we’re so fascinated by the idea of time travel?
It’s a great concept and a great storytelling device. It’s interesting that Stephen King picked the JFK assassination. I think it’s because it was such a devastating, traumatic event for the whole country, maybe even the world, so for Stephen King that was the equivalent of 9/11. And the potential for all these ‘what if’ questions are endless.

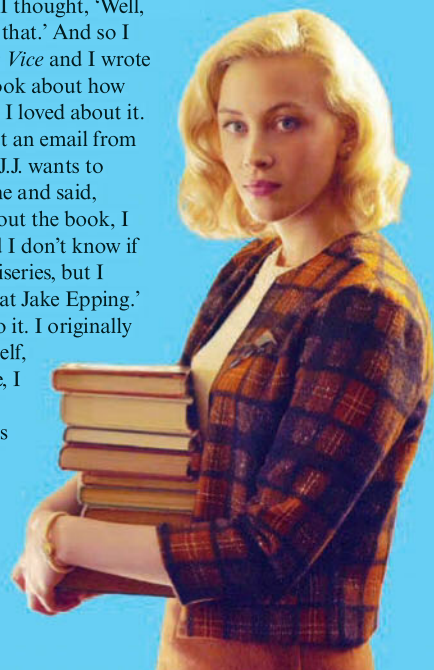
What do you like about this particular storytelling device?
Living in 2016, Jake gets to be the guide into the past. If it was just a typical period piece in 1960 and everybody is of that time, nobody is going to notice things that are different but he gets to really point things out, from superficial stuff to commenting on issues like the racism. It’s interesting.

It’s not unusual these days to see movie stars popping up on SVOD. What interested you in joining the medium?
I had read a book called *Difficult Men*, about a lot of the showrunners of this new third golden age of television, specifically David Chase, David Simon and Vince Gilligan. That really turned me on to this new mode of television. These kinds of series have a limited number of episodes so long arcs can be sculpted and episodes are no longer just one-offs. And the fact that the content can be much more adult and serious is what I liked.

And how did you get on board *11.22.63*?
I read the Stephen King book, loved it, and through a friend got Stephen King’s email. I’d heard Stephen King gave rights away very generously so I thought maybe I’d have a shot. He was very nice and said, ‘I would love to give you the rights but J.J. Abrams has them and he is going to do them as a miniseries.’ So I thought, ‘Well, that’s done; I’ll never get that.’ And so I was writing a column for *Vice* and I wrote a little piece about the book about how much I loved it and what I loved about it. And two weeks later I got an email from Seth (Rogen), that said, ‘J.J. wants to email you.’ J.J. emailed me and said, ‘Everything you liked about the book, I liked. It’s a long shot and I don’t know if you would ever do a miniseries, but I think you would be a great Jake Epping.’ I said, ‘I would love to do it. I originally wanted to develop it myself, so if I could direct a little, I am in.’ He said, ‘No problem.’ And the rest, as they say, is history.
MICHELE MANELIS

***11.22.63* IS ON STAN NOW.**

Above: James Franco is slick in the sixties as Jake Epping in *11.22.63*.
Below: Sarah Gadon as Sadie Dunhill.





EMPIRE TV
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Jon Bernthal is The Punisher, tooled up for *Daredevil* Season 2. No complaints? Exactly

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT** ILLUSTRATION **OLLY GIBBS**



Jon Bernthal, armed and ready to punish.

Something very unusual happened on June 9 last year. Something virtually unprecedented. An actor was cast as a comic book character… and the internet approved. Usually, as soon as a filmmaker or studio dares to cast a comic book superhero in flesh and blood, the protests begin. Both Jared Leto and Heath Ledger got flak when cast as The Joker ("Heath Ledger has the charisma of a lettuce leaf," sniped one poster on Reddit in July 2006). More recently, Benedict Cumberbatch-as-Doctor-Strange incurred ire. And spare a thought for poor Ben Affleck, who faced a change.org petition when he was announced as the new Batman.

Yet, scan tweets from the day Bernthal was cast as The Punisher, and there's lots of squealing, lots of caps, lots of excited F-bombs. The overwhelming consensus: by casting Bernthal as the cop-turned-vigilante in Season 2 of its Netflix show *Daredevil*, Marvel had chosen wisely.

Here was an actor who'd made his name playing grim and gritty in *The Walking Dead*. A man with a thousand-yard stare, don't-fuck-with-me aura and nose broken, six ways to Sunday. Someone who, in essence, looked like he'd stepped straight off the page of a *Punisher* comic.

"Part of me would rather everybody had said, 'That's the worst, that guy sucks!'" says Bernthal. "It's tremendously humbling. I just want to get this right. I walk down the streets of New York all the time and people are telling me, 'Don't fuck this up.' That response did not embolden me, or let me hold my chin high. It just said, 'Time to go to work, motherfucker.'"

A NEW YORK COP FINDS his life in tatters when his wife and child are shot dead. Consumed by grief, he becomes a death-dealing revenge merchant, hunting criminals with a skull on his chest, a gun in his hand and hatred in his heart. His name is Frank Castle, but he calls himself The Punisher.

If the story feels familiar, that's because The Punisher has been an integral part of the Marvel universe since he was created, initially as a *Spider-Man* villain, by Gerry Conway and John Romita in 1974. It might also be because it's been on the big screen already — three times, in fact. Each time, a different actor has played Castle. First there was Dolph Lundgren, with dyed black hair and a dead-eyed stare, in a cheapo 1989 effort put out by New World Pictures. Let's just say it's a good thing Twitter wasn't around when Dolph had a go at the role. Or a bad thing, depending on your point of view.

Then along came Thomas Jane in 2004's *The Punisher*, which more openly embraced its origin, including the skull costume. It was fun, but a box-office fizzle. And finally, in 2008, the spectacularly violent and blackly comedic *Punisher: War Zone* saw Ray Stevenson shoot, punch, stab and blow up everything that moved. It's something of a cult favourite now but crashed and burned commercially, after which the rights quietly reverted to Marvel Studios, who decided that the perfect vehicle for The Punisher was the murky, morally ambiguous and violent world of *Daredevil*.

You could argue that Castle is a one-dimensional character who glorifies violence, who has been roadtested and found wanting, that it's three strikes and out. Equally, you could argue that none of the previous Punisher iterations or actors have had the time, or the inclination, to dive deep into the roiling grief that makes Frank Castle tick, to find those extra dimensions. Well, 13 episodes of a television series solves that problem. As does Bernthal. "I'm giving it everything I have," he says. "This character and his philosophies and the ideas behind it are tremendously important to me."

Bernthal will happily declare that acting saved his life: "Growing up, I was attracted to danger and to trouble. This art, this craft, this work gave me direction. All of a sudden, that same wildness ended up being one of my greatest weapons."

It's noticeable in virtually all of Bernthal's roles, even gentler fare like *Me And Earl And The Dying Girl*. This is a man who was asked to audition for both Rick Grimes and Shane Walsh in *The*







From top: With Charlie Cox in *Daredevil*; As Shane Walsh, alongside Andrew Lincoln and Sarah Wayne Callies, in *The Walking Dead*; Giving 100 per cent in 2014's *Fury*.

Walking Dead, but impressed very strongly upon then-showrunner Frank Darabont that the knotty, complex Shane was the only option for him.

"It was the character of a lifetime," he explains. "At this point in my life I'd just played Al Capone in *Night At The Museum 2*. A character like Shane was what I trained for, what I went to drama school for."

The Walking Dead put Bernthal on the map. From that you can trace lines to Martin Scorsese's *The Wolf Of Wall Street* (where he improvised the scene in which he sells a pen to Leonardo DiCaprio's Jordan Belfort), and David Ayer's *Fury*, the shoot for which was so intense that Bernthal didn't see his family until it wrapped. That included his newborn child. "I basically met my son when he was eight months," he says. "You could have put 10 babies in front of me and I wouldn't have known which one was mine! I go dark for the first couple of months when I try to find the character. We all have our methods."

For The Punisher, Bernthal's method was simple. First, he auditioned by taping a scene with his friend Tom Holland, coincidentally enough the boy who would become the new Spider-Man. Then, role secured, he "went dark". Late every night, for weeks before filming began, Bernthal strapped on a backpack filled with weights and walked the deserted streets, he says, "from Brooklyn Bridge on", trying to find Frank Castle.

"Here's a guy who's had the thing he cares about most in the world taken from him forever," says Bernthal. "It's important not to spend your nights with the creature comforts of a hotel and going to restaurants and partying." And no, nobody messed with him. Probably because he looks just like Frank Castle.

A BRIGHT NOVEMBER

morning in Brooklyn, and *EmpireTV* has come to the set of *Daredevil* Season 2 (working title: *Ringside*) to witness Jon Bernthal in the act of not fucking this up.

"I GO DARK FOR A COUPLE OF MONTHS WHILE I FIND THE CHARACTER."

Today's scene is a crucial moment in a crucial episode towards the tail-end of the season, so we'll go light on the context. Here's what you need to know: there's a boat, and on that boat is a bad man. But he's about to meet a badder man: Frank Castle.

While he waits for director Stephen Surjik to yell "Action", Bernthal stands outside the door of the 'boat' (really a series of cabins constructed on a soundstage). Earlier, when *EmpireTV* chatted to him, he was reclining on a sofa in a green room, clad in civvies, with a *Friday The 13th* baseball cap on his head. Now, he's head-to-toe in black (no skull just yet; expect that to materialise around the season's end), with a black eye blooming across his face. He looks exactly like the kind of guy you'd cross the street then hide in a doorway to avoid if you saw him walking through Manhattan in the middle of the night.

Surjik yells the magic word. The actor playing Man Justifiably Terrified By The Punisher (NB: may not be the character's actual name) wrenches open the door and limps through the cabin into his chambers. After a beat, Bernthal — assault rifle in the ready position — follows. Gunfire is exchanged, and the scene ends with The Punisher standing over the man as he begs for his life. Bernthal takes out a handgun and puts it in the man's mouth. Lost in character, Bernthal calls the man a "cocksucker". "I think it probably took Marvel a little bit of getting used to!" he laughs later.

And then, just as Frank is about to Castle the poor chap, in barges Charlie Cox as that do-gooding Daredevil. "GET OUTTA HERE, RED," yells Bernthal, a line which tells us that, though their methods are different, The Punisher and Daredevil have formed an alliance of sorts. What happens next — Castle leaping up and pushing Daredevil out of the room — tells us that alliance is fairly brittle. In layman's terms, it's about to kick off.

"Frank is so filled with rage and despair that this idea of a guy prancing around in a costume with little horns beating up bad guys is absurd to him," says Bernthal. "It's ripe for a character like Frank to come in and shit on that. What's really interesting is that these guys are absolute enemies, but they start to understand each other."

The second season has barely streamed but there are rumours of a spin-off — so Bernthal might finally be the first to play Castle more than once.

"We're the last to know about those things," he laughs, with the air of a man who isn't afraid of much but is willing to make an exception for non-disclosure agreements. "But this guy is very much burned into my heart and soul. I think about him all the time. And I look at it the same way Frank would look at it. I'm a soldier, man. If they call on me, I'll stand to attention and I'll be ready."

The internet will be pleased.

***DAREDEVIL* SEASON 2 IS ON NETFLIX NOW.**


the rise
fall

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and incredible return of Pee-wee Herman

After 25 years, everyone's favourite madcap manchild is finally back in an all-new movie adventure

WORDS **ALEX GODFREY**

Pee-wee Herman is chomping on a popsicle.



The sun is silly-hot today in South Pasadena, where *Pee-wee's Big Holiday* is being shot, and he's requested something soothing, to cool him down as we talk in his trailer. So here he sits, Pee-wee Herman, once one of the most popular family-entertainment characters in the world, wearing his trademark, tight-fitting grey Glen plaid suit and red bow tie, eyeballing *EmpireTV* and savouring his ice-block. Which is exactly what you'd expect to find Pee-wee Herman eating.

It is also exactly what you'd expect, somehow, of Paul Reubens, the man who has lived and breathed Pee-wee, on and off, for nearly four decades. Here in the trailer, Reubens stays in the suit but ditches the shouty voice — his own is softer, gentler, considerably less animated. Things were different during the 1980s, when he would only do press in character. For a long time, Reubens wanted the world to believe Pee-wee was real, keeping himself hidden from view. Even today, Pee-wee is such a beautifully realised character that knowing there's an actor in there somewhere means nothing when you see him walking about before the cameras, yelping gleefully on the sidewalks of Pasadena. It doesn't feel like a film production; it feels like we're on Pee-wee Herman's street.

It's a little odd to be looking at Pee-wee but talking to Reubens, now 63. *EmpireTV* wonders how it feels to still be sporting that undersized suit 39 years later. "Well, I became an actor because I thought I'd pick a job where I never had to wear a suit, so there's that…" he deadpans. "It feels the same in that way that it did 30 years ago, where I was like, 'Ah, I'm wearing this suit all day!' Between you and me and your billion readers, it's not that comfortable. If I had a choice I'd be Pee-wee Herman with Bermuda shorts and a T-shirt, but it doesn't work as good."

Three decades plus is a long time to have been wearing such a tight outfit, but for Reubens it was certainly worth it. During his '80s heyday, Pee-wee was huge, launching Tim Burton's film career with *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, then becoming one of kids' television's biggest stars with *Pee-wee's Playhouse*, a surreal Technicolor world of talking furniture, cowboys played by Laurence Fishburne and never-ending fun. As snarky as he was sweet, Pee-wee was America's favourite manchild, both adorably sweet and hilariously petulant. Then, suddenly, he disappeared for a few decades. But now, here we are, finally joining him on a new adventure in which Pee-wee, seemingly unbothered by the ravages of time, heads off on his first vacation. It's been a long and crooked road.

PAUL REUBENS WAS born in 1952, and spent much of his childhood in a New York farming community called Oneonta. It was an idyllic town, with animals roaming freely and apple trees lining the street. Pee-wee was born in 1977, in an LA comedy club. The character, Reubens thought at the time, was a spontaneous creation. Looking back, he can trace the DNA.

South Pasadena, which doubles for Pee-wee's street in *Pee-wee's Big Holiday*, as it did in 1985 for *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, is almost unbearably apple-pie, a monument to postcard Americana. When the cameras roll, neighbours wave as they walk past. "Morning, Pee-wee!" says one. "Morning, Mr. Megatron!" Pee-wee hollers back, driving up the road in a miniature Ford Thunderbird. It's all rooted in Reubens's early years. "When I was growing up, America was very much like that, or at least, that's what they were pushing on TV and in books," he says. "Everything I saw as a kid was very idyllic. My parents took me and my brother and sister to every single little storybook-land tourist attraction. All of that is definitely represented in what I do."







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After studying performance art at LA's CalArts, Reubens joined improv group The Groundlings, creating Pee-wee as part of a skit about a comedy club. Reubens dreamed up a hopeless comedian who, like him, couldn't recall punchlines. The name came from a harmonica he had that said "Pee Wee" on it, and an overly enthusiastic kid he'd known growing up whose surname was Herman. The voice came from a teenager Reubens had played in a repertory production. The suit belonged to Groundlings director Gary Austin (who was shorter than Reubens, hence the tight fit). The bow tie was given to him by someone as he went on stage.

The crowd loved it, so he kept pushing Pee-wee, deciding the character would find greater success if Reubens never appeared publicly as himself. He wanted people to think Pee-wee was real, even, in 1979, auditioning for TV's *The Dating Game* as the character. "That was exciting," he says, "because it seemed very conceptual to me, almost performance art. Except no-one knew it was that but me." He got through, appearing on the show three times, and won (the actual date, alas, fell through). His fate was sealed. "I went, 'Whoa, this is what I'm gonna do. Focus on this.'"

And so it was Pee-wee who became famous: Reubens didn't just take a back seat, he locked himself in the boot. It's Pee-wee Herman, not Reubens, who has a star on the Hollywood Walk Of Fame. Years ago, Reubens was offered a spot on reality TV show *The Surreal Life*. He said he would, but only if he could do it as Pee-wee. They said no, so he didn't.

While off-duty, Reubens does not walk, talk or act like Pee-wee, yet he concedes that the line blurs. "I have a lot of affection for the character," he says. "If you strip away all of my horribleness you get Pee-wee Herman. Or a part of Pee-wee. Although one thing we've been trying to be careful about [*on the new film*] is Pee-wee's snarky side. Pee-wee Herman has never been a total innocent. I think lots of people like that he can flip really fast and not be so sweet. If you're exuberant or joyful or snarky or frustrated, everybody has a version of that. I just think that Pee-wee doesn't have that much context because I don't think about it that much and neither does he. He just is."

Judd Apatow, producer of *Pee-wee's Big Holiday*, thinks Pee-wee's appeal is timeless. He's been a fan from the start, having caught Pee-wee's *Dating Game* appearances. "He was always hysterical," he says. "And there are few original characters like that in comedy. People don't do it anymore. It's a throwback to the Marx Brothers. It makes me laugh harder than almost anything. I loved the Marx Brothers, W.C. Fields, Abbott and Costello, Jerry Lewis, and this is as close as we have to that."

Reubens is loathe to analyse Pee-wee's psychological make-up. "Some people were confused about it: 'Is he slow? Is he a man, is he a kid? What is it?' And I never really wanted to explain it much. I never liked to think about it that much because it takes the fun out of it for me. But I also just didn't think it was wise to go, 'He's 26.' Or whatever. If some people thought I was slow, then great. If it works like that."

Above: Our hero (Paul Reubens) hangs out in *Pee-wee's Big Holiday*.
Left: Making his film debut in Tim Burton's *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* (1985).
Bottom left: Falling for Penelope Ann Miller's Winnie in follow-up *Big Top Pee-wee* (1988).

THE CHARACTER'S perceived reality was one of its great strengths, but it also worked horribly against both Pee-wee and Reubens. It is why the media had such a field day when, in 1991, Reubens suffered a high-profile arrest. After exhausting himself in the late '80s — two movies, five TV seasons, with the final two filmed back to back — Reubens had ended *Pee-wee's Playhouse* to take a break from showbusiness. And then, while lying low with his parents in Sarasota, Florida, he was arrested for masturbating in a porn cinema. The incident swiftly and violently dismantled so much of what Reubens had done with Pee-wee. CBS cancelled its re-runs of *Pee-wee's Playhouse*, leading many to believe that this incident actually killed the show Reubens had already ended.

It was easy tabloid fodder. Later, Reubens commented that the story dominated the news even over the grisly revelations about serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, who'd been arrested three days earlier. The mortified actor retreated and went into shock, barely leaving the house for months. He has always maintained he wasn't doing what they said he was doing in that cinema, but didn't want to go through a publicised trial, so pleaded no contest, was given 75 hours of community service and, bizarrely, was asked to do a public service announcement, in character as Pee-wee, about the dangers of crack.

Surprisingly, a few weeks later Reubens was invited, as Pee-wee, to introduce the MTV Video Music Awards. On stage he seemed overwhelmed by the crowd's roars, basking in the glow as they chanted Pee-wee's name. "Heard any good jokes lately?" he said after collecting himself, in reference not only to the ›

water-cooler wisecracks and tabloid attacks, but to his own contemporaries taking shots at him during stand-up gigs. "So funny I forgot to laugh."

Pee-wee's comeback, though, was fleeting. MTV, which had enjoyed a long relationship with him (he'd often appear in its New Year's Eve shows), offered to broadcast re-runs of *Pee-wee's Playhouse*, but Reubens thought it best to just draw a line under the show. Concerned that Pee-wee's image had been tarnished, he instead began taking other roles (see sidebar, right). He also spent three years developing *Meet The Muckles*, a comedy pilot for NBC about a family of variety performers, but when he was finally done the network had lost interest, and passed.

Meanwhile, none of the acting work he'd been doing had been inspiring him. In 1999, appearing on Jay Leno's show to promote his role in *Mystery Men* — the first time he'd ever been on a talk-show as himself — Reubens announced that he was writing a new Pee-wee film. The character, dormant for almost a decade, was always a part of Reubens's id, and wasn't going to sleep forever. "In the same way I went, 'I'm gonna stop doing this,' I just one day went, 'I wanna do it again,'" he says now.

In fact, he was writing various Pee-wee films, two of which he began to mention regularly. There was *The Pee-wee Herman Story*, a more adult, *Valley Of The Dolls*-inspired tale following Pee-wee as he finds fame as a singer, goes to Hollywood to make musical movies, then turns into a pill-popping, booze-guzzling monster. And there was *Pee-Wee's Playhouse: The Movie*, bringing the *Playhouse* world to life outside of the house, in Puppetland. However, Reubens no longer had the clout to make a Pee-wee movie — the character, he was told, was no longer bankable. In a bid to convince studios otherwise, he decided to resurrect the Pee-wee stage show he'd mounted in 1981.

Essentially a live, rather bawdy version of *Pee-wee's Playhouse*, loosely centring around Pee-wee's wish to fly, the 2010 show was a blast, and a hit: in LA, where demand was so great it had to be moved to a larger theatre, it boasted a four-week sell-out run, and then performed to equally ecstatic crowds for a limited two-month run on Broadway. Pee-wee was back, and Reubens's plan to get a movie out of it came up roses.

"My wife Leslie [*Mann*] and I went," says Judd Apatow, "and it's the hardest I've ever seen my wife laugh. She just lost her mind. I thought, 'This is the most fun thing ever, we have to find a way to make





Holiday high-jinks with Alia Shawkat, Stephanie Beatriz and Jessica Pohly.



beyond the playhouse

THE BEST OF REUBENS'S PEE-WEE-FREE APPEARANCES

1

Buffy The Vampire Slayer (1992)

AS: Amilyn

After being abducted by vampiric henchman Amilyn, Buffy later drives a stake through his heart, with Reubens going to town on an incredibly protracted death scene. His first role after his 1991 arrest, rather than shy away from what had happened, he insisted on looking as much like his mugshot as possible.

2

Batman Returns (1992) /*Gotham* (2016)

AS: Tucker Cobblepot

Seven years after working together on *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, Tim Burton cast Reubens as The Penguin's dad, who tosses his deformed baby into Gotham's river at the beginning of the film. He was recently cast in the role again, for fleshed-out prequel duties on TV's *Gotham*. "It's been really fun and really thrilling," says Reubens. "It's extremely bloody and violent."

3

Mystery Men (1999)

AS: The Spleen

Director Kinka Usher was desperate to cast Reubens in the superhero comedy: "I was the kicking and screaming baby saying, 'I have to have him, I have to have him,'" he later said. Reubens repaid him by coming up, well, trumps, as the man who can make people faint with his abominable flatulence.

4

Blow (2001)

AS: Derek Foreal

Loosely based on a real person, Derek is the hairdresser/drug dealer who kickstarts George Jung's (Johnny Depp) illicit career with an obscene amount of marijuana. Director Ted Demme cast Reubens after watching *Pee-wee's Playhouse* with his daughter, challenging him to come up with a character even "a quarter as memorable as Pee-wee." Relishing a more heavy-weight role, Reubens duly camped it up.

5

Life During Wartime (2009)

AS: Andy

In Todd Solondz's re-cast sequel to *Happiness*, Reubens is Andy, the schlub formerly played by Jon Lovitz, who, having taken his own life, now revisits his ex-love Joy in ghostly visions. It's a sombre performance, and Solondz cast Reubens not only to showcase his emotional versatility, but knowing that Reubens's troubled history would give the role extra pathos.

another movie.'" Reubens told Apatow about his new Pee-wee screenplays, but Apatow suggested it would be more logical to do something along the lines of *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, a road-trip movie set in the real world. He introduced Reubens to writer Paul Rust, and they began on a script, with Apatow helping to shape it. "What Judd likes to bring to anything he does," says Reubens, "is a certain character arc and growth… Well, what he usually does applies 80 per cent to this movie. We can't do all of what he asked us to do. Pee-wee Herman doesn't make a huge, big change. Like ever."

Ultimately, Apatow just wanted to help Reubens get his movie made. "This is a man who knows exactly what he wants to do," says Apatow. "A lot of my job was to help find a director he would be in sync with. And a company that wanted to support his vision." Enter Netflix, which stepped up to the plate with healthy funds, and that director is John Lee, who had been responsible for *Wonder Showzen*, MTV2's very dark, very funny take on *Sesame Street*. Reubens gushes about working with Lee, comparing the experience to the one he had with Burton 30 years earlier. "I'm incredibly lucky to have found and worked with Tim, and John Lee has been a rock star. Although now it is more complicated. Me and Tim were practically kids…"

PLAYING THE ETERNAL manchild at 63 is something Reubens has wrestled with. Will it convince, or distract? Is it weird? Does it matter? "At the very beginning," he says of the new film's production, "to conceptualise how I would come back as Pee-wee Herman, it was: 'I'm still gonna play Pee-wee, what does that mean?' We discussed that quite a bit. Do we explain where I've been? But I feel, in the big giant scheme of things, it works to me to just have, 'Here's the third Pee-wee movie.'"

Still, physically, it's a stretch, he says. "Six years ago I was doing Pee-wee on Broadway, doing dialogue I'd written 30 years ago, and part of me would be like, '*What* are you *doing*?! You're too old to be doing this.' I have that feeling on and off here. There's been a few times I'm trying to pour myself into that little teeny car and I'm like, 'Are you out of your mind? Your legs don't bend like that anymore.' Trying to make a Pee-wee movie at this point in my life is certainly like a little bit of a measuring stick: 'Oh, I can do this,' and 'I can't do that.'"

Some digital work, it was decided, should be done to, let's say, smooth out some edges, but they were unsure of how far to go. Should Pee-wee look like he did in 1985? Or maybe a decade older? Ultimately they decided to make only subtle alterations; too much trickery, says John Lee, would have been distracting. "We could have made him look younger, but it starts to look more false. Pee-wee needs to have expression. It's so easy to think of him as an animated character, and the more you push that, the more it takes away the compassion of the character. I'd rather have reality and emotion than make him Peter Pan."

Maybe, though, Pee-wee can stay young forever. Heartened by what technology can do, Reubens says he's even considering, years down the line, playing Pee-wee via performance capture. Then, he says, it doesn't matter how old he is. This, surely, is the ultimate destination for a character who has taken a life of his own: unburdened even by the shackles of his creator's body. In any case, Reubens is enjoying this second act. Last year, *Pee-wee's Playhouse* found new, young fans on Netflix. Is it nice for him to have Pee-wee back on the air? "Well, yeah, absolutely. Better than lots of other places I've been," he says, fixing *EmpireTV* a look that speaks volumes about his past experiences.

Pee-wee's Big Holiday features a Pee-wee as funny, as timeless, as sweet and as snarky as he ever was. Time has not withered him. As ever, this is a character who loves life — played by someone who so clearly loves being him.

Apatow thinks the joy of this film is as much about Reubens as it is Pee-wee. "I feel there's some built-in emotion to just the idea of Paul making another movie," he says. "We've all waited a long time. It's loaded, in a lot of ways: we all want Pee-wee Herman to be happy. And I always felt like that would come through in the movie. We all want him to have a friend, we all want him to be accepted. And that's how you feel as a child as well. It's hard to put your finger on why you love this guy so much. But it makes you so happy. I can watch Pee-wee Herman playing with a balloon for five hours."

Despite the tight outfit and demands on his joints, it makes Reubens happy, too. "I've been bumping around for a while and now I'm just gonna have a nice little capper to my career," he says. "It's kind of fabulous to be Pee-wee Herman." Which may be the most telling thing he's said all afternoon: he's not playing Pee-wee Herman, he *is* Pee-wee Herman. It suits him well.

***PEE-WEE'S BIG HOLIDAY* IS ON NETFLIX NOW.**



A Most Wanted Man

Empire unveils an entirely new kind of cinematic universe, a far cry from the connected heroes of Marvel: one based on the murky espionage thrillers of John le Carré

WORDS **IAN NATHAN**



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In 1958, while stationed at the MI5 building on Curzon Street in London, the man who would become John le Carré ran agents – "Joes" – in the fight against communism.



Tom Hiddleston as *The Night Manager*'s former British soldier Jonathan Pine.

There was one, known as 'Harry', who had joined the Communist Party to spy from the inside. Harry was astonishing; all his energies were focused on his mission. Harry could react at all times like one of the faithful. Despite being paid a pittance, Harry knew no other life. "He had bent his mind until he scarcely knew its old shape anymore," his runner reflected. In some senses, the author of the greatest spy stories ever written has always been telling Harry's story.

It's a story producer Simon Cornwell is determined to spread as far as possible. In a members' club close to Trafalgar Square, he meets with *EmpireTV* to set out his manifesto. "I guess we saw the chance with le Carré to establish a company with a reputation for really smart, entertaining, but often quite challenging storytelling," he announces over tea. So in 2010, he and younger brother Stephen formed The Ink Factory, expressly (but not exclusively) to champion le Carré's work. Their ambition was to mine his back catalogue and create a kind of prestige equivalent to Marvel's Cinematic Universe. It is pertinent to add that the eloquent, humorous Cornwell is le Carré's (real name: David Cornwell) eldest son.

"They are stories that appeal outside their traditional readership," he reflects, meaning they're not just for those who prefer their espionage without ejector seats. "There is a universal quality to a lot of his work."

Beyond the emotional

reasons for Cornwell wanting to be the conduit for his father's creations, these books have extraordinary richness and thrilling plots, drawn deep from his father's secret life. Born in 1931, the potted le Carré biography goes like this: peripatetic childhood, absconded mother, unscrupulous father (a domineering and abusive conman), draconian public schools and a brief escape to cobbled Bern, Switzerland, in 1948, where he was approached by a "lady in sensible shoes" to attend left-wing student groups and "report the names of any British citizens there". Later, MI5 had him infiltrate communist gatherings in Oxford. Later still, MI6 stationed him in Bonn, Germany, where he ran agents going undercover in neo-Nazi cliques, wondering if they ever really came back.

He began to write, translating the "tradecraft" of his daily toil — heavily embroidering it, too — into 23 novels, a fictional universe as defined and beloved as that of Dickens. Like a gateway into a secret club, it had its own jargon — "lamplighters", "scalphunters" and "burrowers" — much of it since adopted by the intelligence services. When *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* (which was made into a brilliant, cold-hearted film with Richard Burton in 1965) became a bestseller in 1963, he dropped out of the service to write full time, denying for years what was patently obvious — that he had been a spy.

"I'm a liar," he later confessed. "Born to lying, bred to it, trained to it by an industry that lies for a living, practised in it as a novelist."

Simon Cornwell wants to be clear he hasn't installed himself as "keeper of my father's holy flame", but to muster great adaptations. His fellow producer, Stephen Garrett, insists that, "It is not taxidermy."

It is also not simply a case of grabbing a book off the family shelf at will. There is a maze of rights ownership across the canon as impenetrable as the ranks of British intelligence. Other producers have been alive to their potential. There have been 15 adaptations to date. The recent *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2011) was backed by Working Title, and *The Constant Gardener* (2005) was a Focus Features release. Both were big hits.

Still, The Ink Factory is now the driving force in the LCCU. It was involved in the Philip Seymour Hoffman-starring *A Most Wanted Man*, and has recently completed *Our Kind Of Traitor*. In the pipeline is a feature version of *A Delicate Truth*, le Carré's most recent novel, being adapted by William Monahan (*The Departed*). "It's a very high-impact book," says Cornwell. "You don't know who is betraying who." Plus, there will be a possible version of *Absolute Friends*, the saga of a friendship that splits along political lines. "With luck we will cast two incredible actors…"

First, though, comes *The Night*

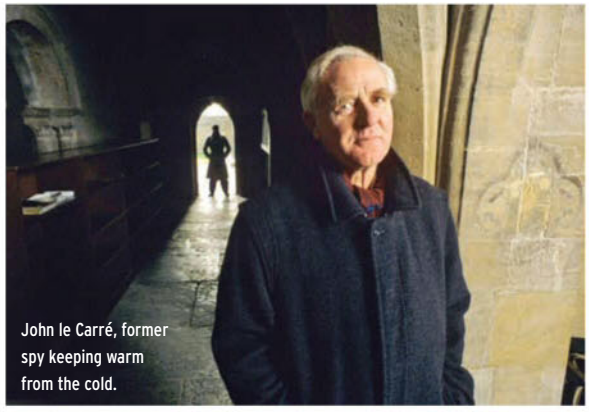


Manager, which Cornwell considers one of the most robust adaptations ever undertaken of a le Carré novel. Cornwell had been impressed by, as he puts it, "the emergence of event-based series, with big budgets and access to enormous talent." So here is a six-part television series aiming at HBO pre-eminence. A real statement of intent by The Ink Factory. And something which provides cast-iron proof that le Carré can be just as bright and glamorous as certain other espionage properties. "It's a different kind of journey," smiles the son of its creator.

Sa Fortaleza, a converted

fortress that straddles an outcrop on the northern shore of Mallorca was, until recently, the most expensive piece of real estate in Europe (once on the market for a cool $AU184 million). It is the kind of palatial spread that once played host to Picasso. Bond villains have settled for less. But for now, it is home to *The Night Manager*, entering its final weeks of production among the infinity pools and state-of-the-art security.

In today's scene, located on an enchanted terrace where a party is being thrown, Hugh Laurie is doing magic tricks for children. He plays Richard Roper, 'The Worst Man In The World', a billionaire chemical weapons dealer who sleeps like a baby despite trading in death. His voice dripping honey, Laurie teases and delights them. Everyone, cast and crew, is suddenly mesmerised by the performance, caught by a python's dance. Only Tom Hiddleston, as ex-soldier Jonathan Pine, who is now undercover in Roper's organisation, is immune. He just watches. "There is something very active about the way Pine is passive," the actor explains, coolly summarising the le Carré MO in the process.


John le Carré, former spy keeping warm from the cold.


Robin Wright and Philip Seymour Hoffman in *A Most Wanted Man*.

The Night Manager has come close to a movie adaptation on two occasions. Shortly after it was published, Sydney Pollack hoped to direct it, and Robert Towne wrote a screenplay. Then it just sat in limbo for five years before Brad Pitt optioned it, but that didn't work out either. "It needed the space of television," maintains Cornwell.

Symbolically, the series returns le Carré to the BBC for the first time in 29 years, home of the exalted 1979 Alec Guinness version of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, and the (arguably even better) sequel *Smiley's People* (1982), as well as an underappreciated take on le Carré's autobiographical masterpiece *A Perfect Spy* in 1987.

Those who have tuned in for fresh intelligence on this tapestry of grouchy espionage might well be wondering what we are doing in a Mediterranean paradise. The sun never shone on Smiley's labyrinth of Cold War intrigue, the prevailing weather pattern being a dank Cambridge Circus, the palette running the full spectrum from porridge beige to tea-stain brown.

"This is a quite conscious choice of doing the opposite," declares director Susanne Bier. "I want the audience to want to be part of this world, and for them to grow more aware of what is beneath."

The Danish director of *In A Better World* has long harboured a secret envy for those who get to direct le Carré. She adores his "staunch moral point of view". She also loves that television allows her to express the subtleties of his work — "to have all the intricate patterns of the characters," she muses happily. And this is a story of globetrotting intrigue 500 pages long. That calls for breadth.

The series starts in Zermatt, Switzerland, flashes back to Cairo, then to London, Devon, Madrid, Mallorca, then Istanbul, the Turkish-Syria border (using Morocco) and back to Cairo. ›

There is a hint of Bond's intrepid universe, certainly Craig-era Bond, about its swirls of wealth and corruption. "Honestly, this has never felt like television," marvels Hiddleston, surely a candidate for 007 if Craig calls time on his glowering. "It has felt like a six-hour film."

There is much more to this universe than gloomy Smiley. Le Carré's post-Cold War novels (*The Night Manager* was written as the Wall fell) have expanded his horizons. Relocated from 1993 to 2016 with very little surgery, here the geopolitical backdrop is the Arab Spring, and the rise in Islamic militancy. Far from being tweedy and bespectacled, *The Night Manager* couldn't be more relevant and, chillingly, has only grown more so since production finished in late July.

And what a cast. Sitting in the luxuriant sunshine, Hiddleston is so articulate, so tuned in to the minutiae of his character, so damnably English, he might as well have been made up by le Carré. It is a further mark of the magnetic draw of the author that they have landed Marvel's loquacious Loki. When Tomas Alfredson set about casting his version of *Tinker Tailor*, there was an orderly queue of British talent waiting to enter its tragi-thrilling underworld. Cumberbatch, Firth, Hardy, Oldman, Strong: it reads like a posh school roll call. Hugh Laurie just happens to be a le Carré nut too, long active in bringing *The Night Manager* to the screen. You could test him on the essentials of the universe, similar to how the crew of *The Lord Of The Rings* would test Christopher Lee's (a spy-turned-actor) knowledge of Tolkien.

Not that le Carré has been an absentee landlord. "He is always quite close to the adaptations," says Cornwell. "He finds engaging with filmmakers hugely exciting." Having his sons as producers obviously helps the flow of intelligence. In this, you could say there has been something active about the way le Carré is passive. He politely questioned the depiction of Olivia Colman's Burr, the outspoken mother-to-be and spook running Pine, feeling it needed to be delicate, with "more kindness in it". And he makes a witty cameo — much like Stan Lee does in the various instalments of his own cinematic universe.

EmpireTV's next stop on this tour of le Carré's new world takes us somewhere slightly more appropriate to the writer's clandestine rubric. It is April 2014, and the shoot for *Our Kind Of Traitor* has set up shop at the famous Ealing Studios. Among its warren of soundstages, the rudimentary interior of a mountain chalet has been built, which is currently being imperilled by a garrison of hoods. Ewan McGregor, Naomie Harris and a gun-toting Stellan Skarsgård, leaning heavily on a Russian accent, are exiting fast through a bolthole in the floor.

"It's really a contemporary thriller," points out Gail Egan, another producer keen to combat the perception that the famous author necessarily signals a dose of unfathomable dad lit. The current scene certainly feels more like a full-on action movie.

For The Ink Factory, co-producing with Egan's Potboiler Productions, this is a straight movie adaptation. In Cornwell's words, "a propulsive story, well adapted to the 100-minute format". Almost Hitchcockian in structure, it follows an innocent if listless couple, Perry (McGregor) and Gail (Harris), who are approached by an extravagant Russian oligarch named Dima (Skarsgård) claiming he has secrets to sell to British intelligence. "Unlike some of his other books," Egan says, "it has at the centre of it an ordinary couple who fall into the world of MI6."

Like *The Night Manager*, *Our Kind Of Traitor* boasts high-end components. Susanna White (*Generation Kill*, *Boardwalk Empire*) is directing, and Ron Howard and Danny Boyle regular Anthony Dod Mantle is the cinematographer, so don't expect the statutory noir gloom here, either. And they've got Paris, Marrakesh, Moscow and the Alps on the itinerary.

The crucial character is Hector. Assayed by the gifted Damian Lewis, he is the MI6 tactician behind Percy and Gail's involvement with Dima. He is the author of their peril, and le Carré's natural surrogate, who has become infatuated with Gail. "It's the personal mixing with the professional," says Egan — another apt description of le Carré's house style.

Though it has a very different feel to *The Night Manager*, it does appear that there will be connections between the two properties, similar even to Marvel's universe — after all, Marvel can't make a move without consulting of comic book lore (and, following *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, are going a bit le Carré too). For example, the "River House" (MI6's fortress on the Thames) that casts an eye over proceedings in *The Night Manager* is surely the very same agency in *Our Kind Of Traitor*.



LeCAMEOS

JOHN LE CARRÉ HAS MADE BRIEF APPEARANCES IN MANY OF HIS ADAPTATIONS. MUCH LIKE A CERTAIN OTHER MOVIE-UNIVERSE CREATOR...

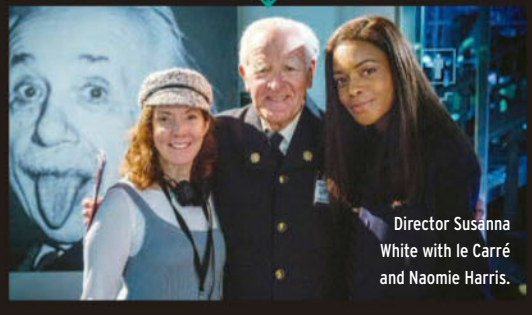
The Little Drummer Girl (1984)
As the policeman who appears when Diane Keaton's Charlie goes to her flat in London.

Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy (2011)
As a tweedy old service gent at the Circus Christmas party leading the jokey rendition of the Soviet anthem.

A Most Wanted Man (2015)
As a thoughtful patron at a seedy Hamburg bar, seated in the booth behind Philip Seymour Hoffman's weary spy Günther Bachmann.

The Night Manager (2016)
As the patron of a Madrid restaurant whose dinner is interrupted when sozzled henchman Corcoran (Tom Hollander) intercepts a lobster meant for him.

Our Kind Of Traitor (2016)
As an attendant at the Einstein Museum in Bern, where a key scene takes place. He speaks perfect Swiss German.



Director Susanna White with le Carré and Naomie Harris.

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Above: Ewan McGregor's Perry, in hot water in *Our Kind Of Traitor*.
Left: Stellan Skarsgård's Russian oligarch Dima.
Below: Damian Lewis's Hector with compromised couple Perry and Gail (Naomie Harris).

This is nothing new, though. George Smiley appears in eight novels, five of which have been adapted. Ned, played by James Fox in *The Russia House* (1994), memorialises Smiley in *The Secret Pilgrim*. Across le Carré's self-styled "saga" there are many such links, but it is as much about thematic unity. Running through his work like a stick of Brighton rock are flawed characters, crushed idealism, thinly disguised autobiography and a determinationto engage with the real world.

Akin to *The Night Manager*, the Anton Corbijn-directed *A Most Wanted Man* (the despairing tale of a German spymaster played by Philip Seymour Hoffman) investigated the moral ambivalence in counter-terrorist methods. *Our Kind Of Traitor* synthesises the new face of Russia (le Carré's old foe). "There is a lot of Russian money in London," notes Egan. But at heart the story is about family. Dima may be an uncouth, unpredictable Russian Mafioso, but he is driven to protect his loved ones. "It's about loyalty, both to those you love and to your country," thrills Egan. "That's a very le Carré theme."

If there is a knack to

adapting le Carré, Stephen Garrett thinks it is about recognising what makes him unique. "If you try to Hollywoodise him you fall into an elephant trap." Such as when a happy ending was tacked onto the otherwise sturdy version of *The Russia House*. "There is a darkness underpinning it, which Hollywood doesn't like," explains Garrett. "The other thing is, and it is not coincidence, the best ones have not been tackled by an American or a Brit, but by a European or Latin American director."

The outsider's perspective has become the ideal vantage point. They couldn't be more thrilled to have not only a European, but a female director on *The Night Manager*. "You are dealing with people who don't express what they feel," says Garrett. "There is a lot of internal combustion going on. Susanne has teased and cajoled and coaxed the cast into delivering brilliant psychological performances."

Spies should be viewed through a perplexed lens, agents of a morally uncertain realm as complex as *Game Of Thrones* (Littlefinger is pure le Carré). The fickle nature of Englishness has been a line of enquiry throughout le Carré's fiction, sourced to his bitterness at the great betrayal by Kim Philby and the Cambridge spies while he was still in the service. *Tinker Tailor* is a direct correlation of that treachery, and key to the dramatic texture of *The Night Manager* is the fact that Roper is English.

"What he is so good at is unpicking something very specific about Englishness," notes Hiddleston. One of the reasons Pine is so driven in his pursuit of Roper is the fact that he is an Englishman willing to sell a private arsenal to an Egyptian crook. "You can feel le Carré's anger that someone who has had the benefits of an English education is using that privilege to do the worst things imaginable."

Start peeling the onion and further layers of meaning emerge. Le Carré, meanwhile, once claimed that all his "great villains have something of my father in them". So Roper too is a reflection of Ronnie Cornwell, the beguiling crook. Life going undercover as art.

Outside the London club,

the evening has turned dark and lamps have been lit, reminding *EmpireTV* of Smiley's atmospherics. People never spoke of a golden age of television in those days, but those BBC versions remain some of the finest drama ever moulded to the small screen. Cornwell hints enigmatically that a possible return to the Cold War might be part of his plans. "It would be an interesting idea, wouldn't it?" Maybe a remake of *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* is in the offing?

Things have come full circle. *The Night Manager* justly takes its place alongside the original Smiley serials. *EmpireTV* can attest to it being intricate, involving television, with a spellbinding evocation of wickedness from Hugh Laurie that makes a mockery of a recent E. S. Blofeld. It feels timely, and timeless. A sure sign that there is further life and relevance in le Carré's world.

Back in Mallorca, Hiddleston takes in a view of impossible wealth and tries to summarise why it is le Carré's network of unordinary Joes refuses to go out of fashion. "This kind of material appeals to that desire to see behind the curtain," he offers. "What deals are being made, who is in whose pocket. When you see that high finance is in bed with politics, which is in bed with the media, there are all these conflicts of loyalty..." It is an expanding universe that looks awfully like our own.

***THE NIGHT MANAGER* IS CURRENTLY AIRING ON BBC FIRST. *OUR KIND OF TRAITOR* IS OUT IN CINEMAS AUGUST 11 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE.**



THE POWER TRIP

Kevin Spacey reflects on the rise of both nefarious commander-in-chief Frank Underwood in *House Of Cards*, and its revolutionary creator, Netflix

WORDS **OLLY RICHARDS** PHOTOGRAPHY **MARCO GROB**

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When you're prepared to do anything to get there, it often doesn't take long to reach the top.

In 2013, at the opening of Netflix's handsome political drama *House Of Cards*, Frank Underwood was just a party whip, a politician with his eye on the biggest job in the world and a ruthless plan for how to snatch it. Now, as the show begins its fourth season, he is the President of the United States, his path to power stained with the blood of enemies and friends alike. In three years Underwood has gone from just one of the pack to snarling top dog.

It's a rate of ascension echoed by the network that created him, although only one of them killed (in the murderous sense, at least) to get there. Nobody could have imagined precisely how fast and how absolutely Netflix would change the way TV works. Well, except one person, the man who plays Frank Underwood: Kevin Spacey.

"Oh, I believed," says Spacey. "I fully believed [*before Season 1 debuted*] that we would be making a fourth season of *House Of Cards*. Somewhere deeper down I believed there would someday be a fifth."

Back in 2011, Netflix's DVD rental and streaming service had not even expanded beyond the US and Canada (it would not launch in Australia until February 2015), so it made a bold move when it announced in March of that year that it would start producing its own projects, beginning with a remake of the 1990 British series *House Of Cards*. The possibility that its original productions would become its chief selling point seemed unlikely, as was the idea that it would compete with traditional TV networks like NBC or ABC.

Yet five years later, Netflix has approximately 75 million subscribers, produces more than 40 original shows (not including one-off specials) and has over 50 more in development. *Orange Is The New Black*, *Daredevil*, *Jessica Jones* and *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* are big hits, critically and commercially. It has redefined TV as much as HBO did during the '90s, and many believe it has now surpassed them as the current gold standard of TV. And it all started with *House Of Cards*.

"WELL, I KNEW SOMEONE was going to do it," Spacey tells us. "It was going to be Google or Yahoo! or Facebook… Somebody was going to say, 'We make gazillions of dollars as a portal for entertainment and if we want to compete and not allow HBO to be the only game in town, then we're going to have to start doing original content.' It just made sense."

House Of Cards was a confident, ballsy statement of intent: that Netflix would be aiming for smart, expensive programming with big name-talent (David Fincher directed the first two episodes, and is an executive producer along with Spacey himself). It is well-written, grown-up TV that expects viewers all over the world to be able to keep up with the complexity and shifting morality of US politics, like an evil *West Wing*. It's now such a beloved modern classic that it's odd to think it was ever considered a risky proposition.

Spacey, Fincher and showrunner Beau Willimon had pitched the show to other networks, but there was one reason they went with Netflix. "Every single network except Netflix loved it but wanted us to shoot a pilot," says Spacey. "Netflix said, 'We don't need you to do a pilot, we've run our analytics and people like your movies, people like David's movies. How many do you want to do? And on top of that we'll give you creative freedom.' Which is what we wanted."

It was a financial gamble, with the show reportedly costing much more than the initially projected $4.5 million per episode. "There were a lot of people who thought we were nuts and thought Netflix was nuts," says Spacey. But the gamble paid off, with *House Of Cards* proving a massive success, drawing in a far greater number of subscribers than anybody had expected.

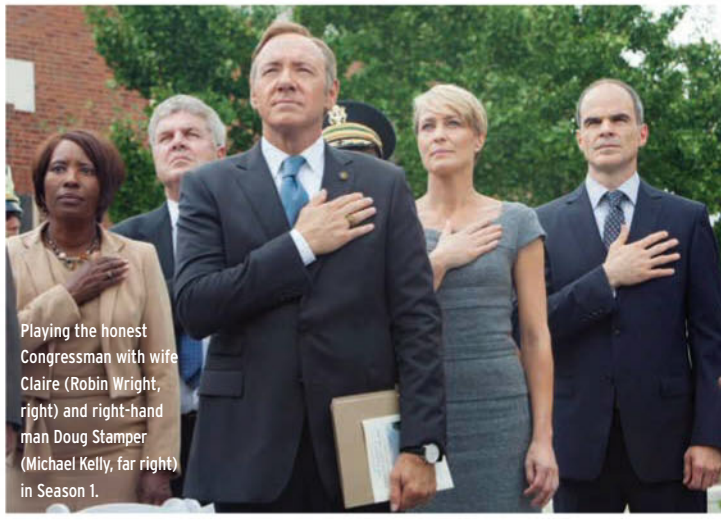
In the years since, both Underwood and Netflix have risen to the top of their respective games, yet how long can either hold their position unchallenged?

In Season 4, with no higher place to go than the Presidency, Underwood is starting to founder. He's lost the support of the people, the loyalty of much of his party and, perhaps most importantly, he's without his wife, Claire (Robin Wright), his partner in crime (often literally). During the final moments of S3, Claire finally snapped, marching both out of the White House and out of her marriage.

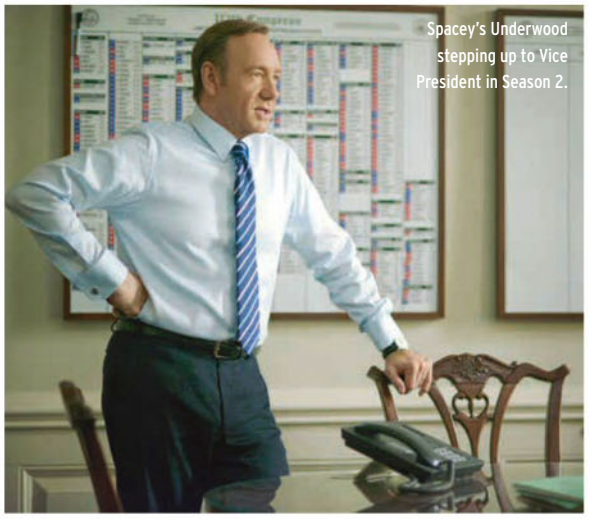


Kevin Spacey as Frank Underwood, campaigning for a second term as US President in Season 4.


Underwood finally makes it into the Oval Office in Season 3.


Playing the honest Congressman with wife Claire (Robin Wright, right) and right-hand man Doug Stamper (Michael Kelly, far right) in Season 1.





Spacey's Underwood stepping up to Vice President in Season 2.



Robin Wright confers with showrunner Beau Willimon.

Spacey insists that relationship has always been at the very heart of *House Of Cards*. "It's so interesting to examine these two figures, who have been extremely successful working in the dark shadows and alleys, who suddenly found themselves in the hottest, whitest spotlight they could be in, and no longer functioning in the way they did," he says. "What we were interested in examining was how does that pressure influence both the way they go about doing what they do and their relationship? Where that will lead?"

Season 4 will see Frank continuing his campaign for a second term as President, without his wife but with his right-hand man, Doug Stamper (Michael Kelly), back at his side. In a sense, Frank is where we first found him, trying to lie and cheat his way into people's trust, except this time he's already got the job he wanted and his fight is to keep it.

As for Netflix, such is the speed of its success that others have come along and imitated. Amazon has leapt into creating its own content, delivered on its Prime service — currently available on Stan here (although rumours abound about Amazon starting an Australian service in the near future). It doesn't have the same quantity of series as Netflix, but it has the quality. At last year's Emmy Awards, Amazon took home five prizes to Netflix's four, all for the comedy *Transparent*. It won two Golden Globes, too, for *Mozart In The Jungle*. Netflix won none.

Yet awards don't count for nearly as much as viewing figures. Although it's hard to calculate the number of subscribers to Amazon's video service (Amazon Prime has around 50 million subscribers, but Prime membership is chiefly sold on the promise of free postage on Amazon purchases, so shoppers aren't necessarily watchers), Amazon is one of the wealthiest companies in the world, so has the funds to match Netflix's output. Others are testing the waters, too, with mixed success. Yahoo! created a sixth season of the comedy *Community*, formerly on NBC, for its Yahoo! Screen service, although Yahoo! Screen was shut down in January. Every battle has casualties, but this one isn't over.

NETFLIX WILL CERTAINLY have its figurehead for a while longer. A fifth season of *House Of Cards* has been confirmed (though without Willimon as showrunner), making Frank Underwood by far the longest-running role of Spacey's career, including stage work.

"Why wouldn't I want to do something that's incredible to do?" he asks. "What am I supposed to be doing, something else? I love the fact that I get to come to work and discover stuff about this character I didn't know. I sometimes hear people talk about, 'Oh, I know everything about my character and I know exactly what my character would do,' and I thank God that I don't feel that way." And can he see himself playing Frank indefinitely?

"Well, not indefinitely," he sighs, a little irritated by the question. "There will come a time when we will make the decision that this will come to an end, but I can't tell you how long that is… You're asking me to speculate so you can say, 'Kevin Spacey says Season 5's the end.' I have no idea. It could be Season 5, Season 6, Season 7. I can't give you that headline."

> "I love the fact that I get to come to work and discover stuff about this character."

That early gamble on Netflix's future has put Spacey at the vanguard of this particular growth industry. He says he lacks the time to watch much TV but admires *Orange Is The New Black* and *Narcos*. As one of the first people to recognise the streaming revolution, what does Spacey think will be the *next* revolution in storytelling?

"Augmented reality and [*virtual reality*]," he says, deadpan, like he's suggested we'll soon be watching TV via chips in our heads from our hover loungers. "I am completely serious," he confirms. "I've seen the future and it's awesome. I'm very involved in the VR world, so I believe in it, and I think augmented reality is the future and we will see over the next four or five years what a dynamic place that will be for storytelling, entertainment, sports..."

He's backed the right horse once. You may want to go and buy some shares in AR right now.

***HOUSE OF CARDS* SEASON 4 IS ON NETFLIX NOW.**

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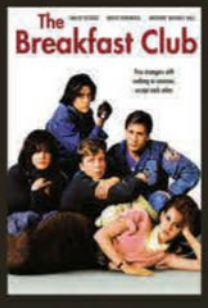




5th Feb



19th Feb



4th Mar



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8th Apr



22nd Apr



6th May



20th May

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MR. ROBOT: S1

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+**

CREATOR **SAM ESMAIL**

CAST **RAMI MALEK, CHRISTIAN SLATER, CARLY CHAIKIN, PORTIA DOUBLEDAY, MARTIN WALLSTRÖM, GRACE GUMMER**

DVD BR

BYTE CLUB

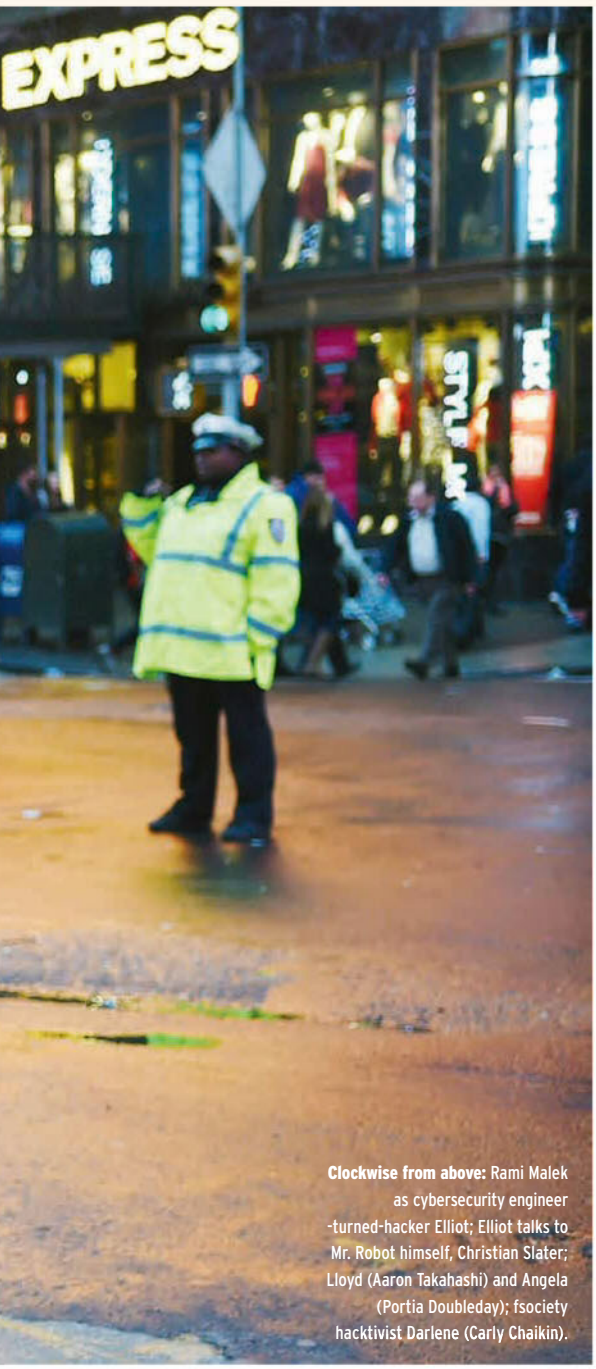


WHEN CABLE CHANNEL USA Network announced *Mr. Robot* last year, the response was weary indifference. After all, hackers ranting anti-capitalist screeds were *so* 2014, while its star was a character actor best known for playing the Pharaoh in *Night At The Museum*. Now, buoyed by critical acclaim and with a pair of Golden Globes bouncing around in its backpack, Sam Esmail's jittery tech thriller is getting the attention it deserves.

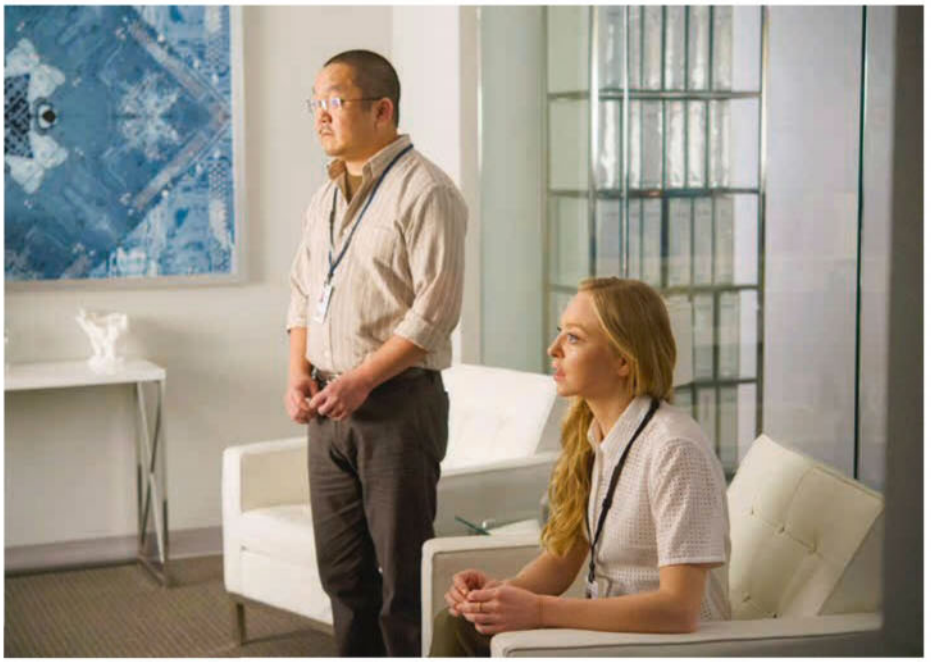
What Michael Mann failed to do with $100 million and a box of CGI, Esmail and director Niels Arden Oplev (2009's *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*) manage in a single, hour-long pilot: they make using computers look fun. We don't need byte's-eye views of data skittering down glowing pathways — just a believable character exploiting human fallibility to unearth close-kept secrets: be they corporate misconduct or a therapist's predilection for anal porn.

That the first episode plays like a movie is no accident. Originally conceived as a feature, this first season marks what would have been the first act of Esmail's film — subsequently re-worked and pitched for television after growing beyond its original scope. Esmail's influences (among them *Taxi Driver*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Fight Club* and *The Matrix*) are worn proud and loud, and *Mr. Robot* makes no apology for its cinematic aspirations.

The character at the heart of the show is Elliot, a nervy recluse with the social skills of a lunchbox, cursed with a menu of unspecified personality disorders that render him incapable of normal human interaction. Instead, he moves through the world alone, aided by a carefully administered morphine regimen and connecting with people by violating their personal data. It's a harmless, if creepy, existence until he becomes entangled with masked hacktivist group "fsociety", fronted by a flamboyantly nutso Christian Slater as the title character. Along







Clockwise from above: Rami Malek as cybersecurity engineer -turned-hacker Elliot; Elliot talks to Mr. Robot himself, Christian Slater; Lloyd (Aaron Takahashi) and Angela (Portia Doubleday); fsociety hacktivist Darlene (Carly Chaikin).

with Mr. Robot and his rag-tag band of nerd vigilantes, Elliot executes an elaborate plan to take down über-conglomerate E Corp (or "Evil Corp" as Elliot dubs them), erasing all the world's debt into the bargain.

Elliot's misalignment with social norms, illegal second life (his day job is cyber-security for Evil Corp themselves) and persistent narration brings to mind *Dexter*, except with server racks instead of kill rooms. He's an awkward, fragile and deeply vulnerable protagonist, played to perfection by the show's secret weapon: saucer-eyed star Rami Malek. Shouldering most of the dramatic load, Malek's function as the show's narrator and principle point of view places him at the heart of almost every scene, each of which he steals, even from Slater's grandstanding.



When Elliot does take a back seat, the secondary plotlines are picked up by his childhood (and only) friend, Angela (Portia Doubleday), and Evil Corp's VP Of Technology, Tyrell Wellick (Martin Wallström). The latter in particular lends the show a sinister tone. Tyrell (a nod to *Blade Runner*'s corporate overlord) is a predatory character, neither ally nor true antagonist, with a penchant for violent tantrums and BDSM with his heavily pregnant wife. The secondary threads twine around the central story before (deliberately) undermining it completely, when it becomes apparent to the viewer just how unreliable our deranged narrator really is.

It's here where *Mr. Robot* truly shines. That there's a third-act rug-pull may seem like a spoiler, but Esmail's prestige is heavily signposted from episode one. Elliot's inner voice manifests within the show's reality (his nickname 'Evil Corp' is adopted even by its CEO), resulting in a delirious, dream-like quality and indication that everything is not what it seems.

A zeitgeisty exploration of cyber-terrorism in the modern age, shot through a nihilistic lens, this is among 2015's best shows. The finale is a curveball — neither what you expect, nor necessarily what you want — but it marks the end of a sharply written, refreshingly original ride.

EXTRAS Deleted scenes, gag reel and *M4k1ng_0f_Mr_R0b0t.mov*.

JAMES DYER



Community: S6

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M**

Since creator Dan Harmon was fired after Season 3 (he returned after Season 4), *Community* has fizzled in the ratings, shed core cast members, and bounced from network to network. Yet this final season shows there's still life in Greendale Community College. The new, longer format sometimes drags, but newcomers Paget Brewster and Keith David mesh well with the remaining cast. Some episodes struggle (Chang as an advertising super-star) but others shine (the spy-themed third in the paintball trilogy); if this is the end, it's leaving on a high.

EXTRAS Deleted scenes, gag reel, more.

ANTHONY MORRIS



Catastrophe

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+**

An American man and an Irish woman meet in a packed London bar. It sounds like the beginning of a bad joke, but luckily it isn't. It's the opening of *Catastrophe* and it's very, very funny indeed. Starring Rob Delaney and Sharon Horgan as Rob and Sharon, a horny couple who have a drunken fling that leaves her pregnant, *Catastrophe* is anything but. Full of biting humour, fantastic support from the likes of Ashley Jensen (*Extras*) and Carrie Fisher and incredibly likeable performances from the two leads, this is an adult comedy that's romantic at heart but not afraid to tell it like it is.

EXTRAS None. DAVID MICHAEL BROWN



THE BIG CHEESE

ALISON BRIE TALKS *MAD MEN*, *COMMUNITY* AND CLOWN SCHOOL

INTERVIEW BY **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

Mad Men finished last year. Are you missing it?

I am, a lot. I watched the final episode of *Mad Men* at home with my father. I cooked dinner and we drank wine and watched it. It was great. We kept stopping and starting, though, because my dad likes to discuss what you're watching while you're watching it. But it's interesting because his father, my grandfather, worked for a period of time as an ad man. It was kinda cool to hear his stories.

Have you kept up with anyone from the show?

I've not. It's tough. The cast members of *Community* are much more like a family to me. I take more ownership of that show. We make an effort to see each other and we have a group text that is constantly pinging away, every day, so we still feel very connected. Ken [*Jeong*] uses the most emojis. He's huge on emojis. He likes to use the purple angry face and the flames!

"Ken Jeong uses the most emojis, He's huge on emojis."

Is it true that _Halloween_ was filmed at your high school?

That is true. It sucks now, because they basically tore down the whole place, so it doesn't look the same at all. It's really a shame. When I was a freshman and sophomore, I had a locker that you could see in the movie! I always found that super-cool. The town I grew up in, South Pasadena, had a lot of movies shot in it. *Old School* was shot a block from my high school. We'd go by the set of the *Beethoven* movies, where I got to meet Charles Grodin. *Father Of The Bride* was shot in Pasadena proper. My dad would drive my sister and I past the house, because we thought it was so cool!

Famously, you once worked as a clown. Were you a scary clown?

I was not a scary clown. I was called Sunny and I had a yellow 'fro and yellow-and-white polka dot outfit. I was 17 years old and I did it for a summer and it was a great job. When I think about doing something like it now, it totally terrifies me: "Go and entertain these 20 seven-year-olds for an hour!" Kids can be tough critics. But it was actually really fun. I had a boombox and a bag full of tricks. I would play music and put down a parachute for us all to sit on. I'd make balloon animals and paint faces. My balloon animals weren't great, though. My giraffe looked exactly like my wolf. [*Laughs*] The only downside was all the dads hitting on me and walking me to the car and stuff. You're trying to balance doing these games with not showing your underwear to looming dads.

You worked with Chevy Chase for many years on _Community_. What's your best Chevy story?

I have a number of stories, but what can I share with you now? [*Laughs*] The first season of the show, I'm standing out in front of this stage, on a break. And Chevy, who has a mischievous side, appears and says, "Come with me." He takes me over to this golf cart and takes me on a joyride around Paramount. I'm freaking out, because it's this new big job for me and I don't want to get in trouble. We turn a corner, there's this big van blocking the middle of the road, and there's only a tiny gap between it and the wall. Chevy goes, "We can make it." I look at him and say, "Chevy, we can't make it!" He floors it, which means we're up to about eight kilometres an hour, and we slowly inch through, knocking the driver's side mirror off the van. The driver gets out, this huge guy, and I'm really scared. Then the guy says, "Oh my God, are you Chevy Chase?" He just wanted a photo with him. Chevy and I should make a *Mad Max*-style movie, just us in that golf cart.



Marvel's phase four didn't have the budgets of its predecessors.

Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M** / CREATORS **TINA FEY, ROBERT CARLOCK** / CAST **ELLIE KEMPER, TITUSS BURGESS, CAROL KANE, JANE KRAKOWSKI, LAUREN ADAMS, JON HAMM**

DVD N

CULT HIT



A YOUNG GIRL IMPRISONED for 15 years by a doomsday cult doesn't sound like the set up for a laugh riot, but thanks to the witty word processing of *30 Rock*'s Tina Fey and her writing partner Robert Carlock (*Saturday Night Live*), *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* is a bright and breezy joy, vying with Aziz Ansari's *Master Of None* as the funniest show on Netflix.

Giving *The Office* star Ellie Kemper her first leading role as the titular Kimmy, the show follows the ever positive captive after she, and her fellow 'mole women', are rescued. Her young adult years stolen from her, Kimmy has trouble assimilating into the modern world after she moves to New York City to restart her life. Hilarity ensues.

The show's great strength is that it's brimming with colourful characters, from Kimmy's wise-cracking landlady Lillian (Carol Kane) to her flamboyant struggling actor roommate Titus Andromedon (scene stealing Tituss Burgess) to socialite Jacqueline Voorhees (Jane Krakowski, basically replaying Jenna from *30 Rock*) who takes Kimmy on as a nanny to an awesome Jon Hamm as Kimmy's captor, the Reverend Richard Wayne Gary Wayne.

Kemper's winning personality shines through but this is Fey's baby (the writer also makes an appearance as one half of an inept lawyer team — heavily influenced by the lead prosecutors in the O.J. Simpson murder case). Every line oozes Fey's trademark kooky wit. Kimmying is the new blergh! You heard it here first.

EXTRAS None. DAVID MICHAEL BROWN

BONUS FEATURE

COMIC FORCE

ELLIE KEMPER TALKS BLACK COMEDY AND PEEING

What were your initial thoughts on the show's premise?

When I first heard the idea I did think it was a prank because I didn't think that this would be the likeliest premise for a show, for a comedy. I knew Tina Fey and Robert Carlock were creating it so I would do anything they were involved with.

Is it true that a barometer of funniness for you is, well... if you pee?

I think it's a good barometer. It's not like I have to wet my pants to know I'm having a good time but it's never a bad time if I'm wetting my pants! [*laughs*]

So who is so hilarious they make you wet you pants?

Joan Rivers, I loved. What I so admired about her was her determination to keep working and she made her own breaks and if she wasn't happy or wasn't working, she just created her own material. I think that's the key to a long career. She was so funny.

JIM MITCHELL





Veep: S4

★★★★★

FROM **APRIL 20** / RATED **MA15+**

DVD

Now she's the President, everything's changed for former Veep Selina Myer (Julia Louis-Dreyfus) – apart from her inability to get things done. Her defence cuts anger everyone, the Family First bill is a bust, her team is bailing for the private sector and new Veep Tom James (Hugh Laurie) is too popular for Myer's good in an election year. With the funniest cast and the meanest dialogue on television, the new team-up of bungling underlings Jonah (Timothy Simons) and Richard (Sam Richardson) puts this season over the top. *Veep* is second to none.

EXTRAS Featurettes, more.

ANTHONY MORRIS



Black Comedy: S2

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M**

DVD

Brave, daring and pitch black, the second season of the ABC sketch comedy show boasts a wealth of outrageous comedy creations. With a stellar indigenous cast that includes Deborah Mailman and catchphrases sure to catch fire, *Black Comedy* is willing to say what everyone is thinking, poking fun at white Australia's casual, ingrained racism. Highlights include police squad Blakforce, *GoodFellas* pastiche *The Elders*, the weird Ozploitation tribute *Wandaroorah* and the outrageous foul-mouthed camp of gay blackfellas the Tiddas. Aussie race relations have never been this funny. What's this then, slut?

EXTRAS Bonus sketches, bloopers.

DMB



No, not a *Police Academy* renactment. Although someone gets screwed.

Making A Murderer: S1

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M** / CREATORS **LAURA RICCIARDI, MOIRA DEMOS** / CAST **STEVEN AVERY, DEAN STRANG, JERRY BUTING, KEN KRATZ**

N

YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH



SINCE UNLEASHING *HOUSE* *Of Cards* back in 2013, Netflix have been finetuning their bingeing formula. Some shows have arrived with more of a fizzle (*Marco Polo*) than a bang (*Orange Is The New Black*), whilst others have become firm fan favourites (*BoJack Horseman*). *Making A Murderer* is the first of the platform's programming that truly begs to be watched in one sitting, landing with next-to-no fanfare before erupting into a cultural phenomenon that has resulted in petitions considered by Barack Obama, confused water cooler chat, and a strong temptation to throw your television out the window.

Those that dive headfirst into the documentary series knowing the story's minutiae will have a completely different experience to those in the dark. But this isn't to say that anyone aware of the outcome won't still be moved. Filmed over 10 years and subsequently split into 10 episodes, the filmmakers couldn't possibly know what route their documentary would take (see also: Alex Gibney's *The Armstrong Lie*, Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line*). The 10-episode arc answers less questions than it raises, though to delve too far would be to remove the emotional impact — this is a show unafraid to leave questions unanswered.

Making A Murderer follows the plight of Winconsin salvage yard-worker Steven Avery. Having served 18 of his 32-year sentence for the sexual assault and attempted murder of Penny Beerntsen, new DNA evidence finds him— a man who continually pleaded his innocence — acquitted. But the welcome home banners don't last far beyond the first episode. Just two years after his release, the then 43-year-old Avery is arrested on suspicion of murdering Teresa Halbach — an *Auto Trader* photographer he'd commissioned to help sell vehicles on numerous occasions.

Portrayed as pariahs of the Manitowoc County's close knit society from the outset, the Averys' "keep-themselves-to-themselves" attitude doesn't grant any favours in a town that operates within a rigid community mould. So, when theories of a police witchhunt rear their head, they're not hard to believe. Can one man really be wrongfully imprisoned for two separate crimes? The county's apparent want to get rid of the Averys gathers steam as a combination of events (including tampered evidence, baffling courtroom inconsistencies, and the coercion of Steven's mentally-challenged teenage nephew) fuse into what quickly appears to be a very dogged pursuit.

But — to paraphrase Rudyard Kipling — you have to keep your head when all about you are losing theirs. It's incredibly difficult to stay impartial throughout the 10 episodes when the evidence seems to fall so heavily in Avery's favour. The filmmakers often start leading you down a rabbit hole before abandoning the thread entirely, never making it clear whether their motive was to keep you guessing or whether they lacked the evidence to follow their hunches through. They are essentially doing the detective work before your eyes, and often — and very frustratingly — leads go cold.

Question marks appear over the involvement of those close to Teresa (a phone hacking incident speaks volumes), but the series (and Manitowoc police force) decides it's not worth honing in on — even if there's a palpable sense of doubt whenever we encounter ex-boyfriends, roommates and, to an extent, her brother, Mike. *Making A Murderer* employs an abundance of footage and talking heads, but nearly all of the featured girlfriends, officials and family are pro-Avery. The trial jury have the potential to be swayed by incessant media coverage of the Avery/Halbach case, but it's Steven's charismatic and impossibly hopeful defence double-act (and newly-crowned internet meme sensations) Dean Strang and Jerry Buting who ensure the viewer remain, even at the show's darkest points, Team Avery. (Conversely, expect District Attorney Ken Kratz to be 2016's Halloween costume of choice.)

Making A Murderer is undoubtedly the current jewel in Netflix's crown and isn't something to visit in weekly instalments — to do so would undermine the near-flawless cliffhanger mould. The lack of a neat finale is exasperating, but this ultimately lies outside the filmmakers' control. A lot of things are left unclear in this harrowing and extremely frustrating crime saga, but the main takeaway is that it is possible to create event television without making a show's launch an event in itself.

EMMA THROWER



MAKING A PHENOMENON

DIRECTORS LAURA RICCIARDI AND MOIRA DEMOS REVEAL WHY THEY HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO MAKE *MAKING A MURDERER*

WORDS **SIMON BRAUND**

EAVESDROP ON ANY DINNER party in the Western World right now and the chances are you'll hear impassioned discussion of *Making A Murderer*, the 10-episode Netflix documentary series that chronicles the case of Steven Avery, a Wisconsin man exonerated for a sexual assault in 2003 after spending 18 years in jail and now serving a life sentence for an entirely different offense. Made over a period of 10 years by filmmakers Laura Ricciardi and Moira Demos, *Making A Murderer* is a bona fide TV phenomenon. *(*See the show's review, left, for background and narrative.*)*

Were it not for the efforts of Ricciardi and Demos this might have remained another of those suspiciously pungent cases that seem to be swept under the carpet of the American justice system with disturbing regularity.

"The reason we chose to tell Steven Avery's story," says Demos, "is that he wasn't just accused of a crime, he was a DNA exoneree. He had indisputably been failed by our system in the mid-'80s and was here, through a series of events, stepping back into that system. That's what we recognised, an invaluable window that allowed us to look at the system over time."

Both Demos and Ricciardi, who met as undergraduates at Columbia University film school, assert that their aim was not to prove Avery's guilt or innocence but to use his case to trigger a dialogue on the American justice system, who it serves and who it fails. "What kept us going all this time," says Ricciardi. "is knowing that this is such an important story. So the fact that people all over the world are watching it, engaging with it and talking about it, we couldn't ask for more."

"Some people [*270,000 of them*] expressed their views by signing a petition that went to President Obama," says Demos. "Other people have expressed what they've taken from it on social media. They're expressing gratitude for shining a light on the system and doing so with care. Other people are expressing horror and even rage."

Much of that horror and rage concerns a turn of events that not even Demos or Ricciardi saw coming. While they were preparing to return to New York before the start of Avery's trial, they were summoned to a press conference. It was here they learnt that Avery's 16-year-old nephew Brendan Dassey had also been charged with Teresa Halbach's murder. His trial ended in conviction and he too is now serving a life sentence. It's this aspect of the case that has caused the most heartfelt outpourings from viewers. Not only was Dassey a juvenile charged and prosecuted as an adult, but, it was subsequently revealed, he also has evident learning difficulties and the confession on which his — and Avery's — conviction rested appears shamelessly coerced. "That raised so many questions for us," says Ricciardi. "An argument can be made both ways: Brendan was vulnerable in regard to police techniques, but he could also have been vulnerable to Steven Avery. It brought a whole new dimension to the story; we had no idea we'd be taking on the treatment of juveniles in the justice system."


Calument District Attorney Ken Kratz.

Naturally, *Making A Murderer* has not met with universal approval. Halbach's family have branded it biased saying that it seeks "profit from their loss." Manitowoc sheriff Robert Hermann labelled the series "skewed", while admitting that he'd never actually seen it. Claims by the prosecution that they'd been denied an opportunity to present their side of the story receive short shrift from Demos and Ricciardi. "We [*gave them*] multiple opportunities, multiple offers to participate," says Demos.

News reports and personal testimony has also since surfaced that paint Steven Avery as a violent and abusive character. Jodi Stachowski, Avery's former fiancee, changed her story after the series went live, claiming in a TV interview that Avery had forced her to say positive things about him on film. "I can't say why Jodi Stachowski is saying what she's saying to the media now," says Demos. "What's in the series is an accurate portrayal of what she said to us when we filmed with her nine years ago."

"I guess what I'd ask you is this," says Ricciardi, "How is any of that relevant to this individual's right to a fair trial?"

***MAKING A MURDERER* IS ON NETFLIX NOW.**

"We chose Avery because he wasn't just accused, he was a DNA exonoree."


Directors Laura Ricciado (left) and Moira Demos (right) flank cinematographer Iris Ng.

ALSO OUT



Luther: S4

★★★☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+**

Idris Elba's tweedy copper is back, this time dealing with a cannibal, an East London gangster and a psychic. The elements are all there (maverick tactics, LOTS OF SHOUTING!) and Elba's on fine form, but this two-parter isn't *Luther* at its best, with the absence of Ruth Wilson's sociopath Alice Morgan painfully felt. **JD**



Sherlock: The Abominable Bride

★★★☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M**

The first half of this 90-minute Christmas special is a rollicking ride, setting Victorian versions of Holmes and Watson on the trail of a wedding-veiled ghoul. Then it all goes a bit *Inception*, upending the cute conceit with a big tricksy twist. The result is ambitious but uneven. **NDS**



Girls: S4

★★★☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+**

If you're hoping for redemption in Season 4, you'll be disappointed. But Christ, that'd be boring. What you *do* get is Shoshanna, Hannah, Marnie and Jessa edging towards their own character arcs for the first time. The standout performance, however, is from Gaby Hoffman as Caroline. Every line she spits is glorious. **TW**



ON-SET EXCLUSIVE

LUTHER

TV'S MOST DEDICATED DETECTIVE RETURNS FOR A LIMITED PERIOD ONLY

WORDS **OWEN WILLIAMS**

IT'S A BRIGHT SPRING morning in the London suburb of Bethnal Green and a hunched Idris Elba is loping across a road, with hands stuffed firmly in the pockets of a familiar tweed coat, blood-red tie flapping in the wind. Despite creator Neil Cross's insistence that the 2013 finale marked the end of his small-screen exploits, DCI John Luther is back on the East London beat.

"We thought the fans maybe felt a little unsatisfied," growls Elba, in Luther's rumbling bass. "So we decided to do one more before making *Luther* into a movie one day." The result is two hour-long episodes that will pick up after the on-screen carnage of Series 3, which ended with long-time sidekick DS Ripley (Warren Brown) taking a fatal shotgun blast to the chest.

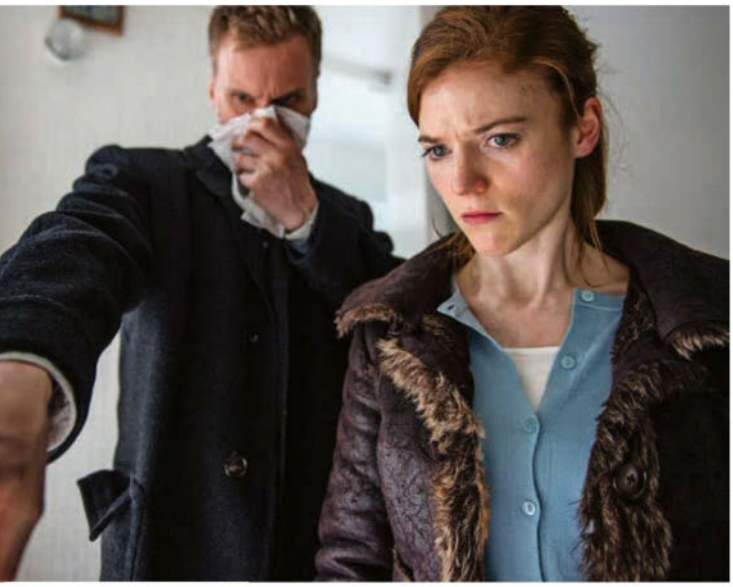
"You're best off avoiding Luther," Elba grins. "People die around him all the time — someone's always getting hurt. That'll always be part of it: really horrible people doing horrible things!"

Having already faced a succession of serial killers with peculiar idiosyncrasies (occultism, racism, vigilantism, a shoe-fetish), Luther will spend Series 4 in pursuit of a murderer with a taste for

Above: Idris Elba pounds London's pavements with his characteristic swagger in pursuit of a computer-expert cannibal.
Right: Darren Boyd's DCI Theo Bloom is joined by *Game Of Thrones*' Rose Leslie as DS Emma Jones.







human flesh: a computer technician who spies on would-be victims through their webcams.

Pictures of this particular killer's work are currently pinned to a corkboard in the bullpen of a disused telecom building (subbing here for police HQ). Boys in blue mill about while Michael Smiley's Benny and new addition *Game Of Thrones*' Rose Leslie (playing detective Emma Jones) pore over the cannibal's leftovers. Luther, meanwhile, paces back and forth, glowering up a storm as he imagines what he'll do when he eventually gets the killer in a room.

"I think that's what attracted me," Elba tells us between takes. "Luther is a good guy, but at the same time he doesn't mind going after a criminal in a way outside of what he's supposed to be doing as a detective. I just love the concept that he's as bad as the bad guys, but working on the good side. Everything was quite politically correct on British TV for a while, then along came a TV show with a hero who's kicking down doors and throwing criminals over railings."

Having decamped to the Hollywood Hills in recent years, with a recurring part as Asgardian Heimdall in the Marvel Universe movies and a secret role in the upcoming *Star Trek Beyond*, fans were pleasantly surprised to see Elba returning to the humble BBC.

But here he sits, relaxed, in a green room comprising a camp table, two space heaters and a half-eaten bag of thick-sliced Helgas.

"It's about my roots," he insists. "I consider *Luther* to be part of my heritage. And I actually love doing television. I think I'm probably one of the first actors that was part of this wave where being on TV and on film at the same time was cool. For me, it feels even cooler to go off and do big films, then come back and knock the socks out of a really good TV drama."

At two hours, Series 4 is *Luther*'s most concise outing yet, in fact calling it a series is a tad generous, but the detective's swan-song will feature "explosions" in his personal life and some suitably dark chapters from his past, including connections to a long-dead case involving a child molester. Prepare to be shocked.

And what of Ruth Wilson's sociopathic Alice, Luther's unlikely ally who remains on the run? "Her presence is definitely felt," teases Elba with a smirk. "She's a great character; we love her. And that's all I'm going to say…"



House Of Cards: S4

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+** N

When your closet contains as many skeletons as that of Frank Underwood, eventually it's going to be difficult to keep the door closed. Over three seasons of Netflix's flagship drama, Underwood (Kevin Spacey) has betrayed, bullied and killed to reach, and remain in, the most powerful office in the world. In Season 4, his past refuses to remain locked up and revenge comes calling.

Last year the plot flowed like cold treacle, but here it surges. Underwood is brought low by an old enemy most of us had forgotten about; as he falls, Claire (Robin Wright), who walked out on him in last season's final seconds, rises up. She's shed the last vestiges of humanity and ramped up her ruthless ambitions. It's a treat to watch Wright match Spacey's snarling wickedness with her own cooler cruelty.

The show has also now found a worthy foe for Underwood. Played by Joel Kinnaman, Republican Presidential hopeful Will Conway seems everything Underwood is not: young, handsome, modern, outwardly likeable. This being *House Of Cards*, we of course discover the murkier parts of his soul, and the show enjoys the contrasts between the two men. There are developments that in isolation sound utterly ridiculous – although looking at current US politics it may be argued that utter ridiculousness is the new normal – but one of this show's great strengths is in getting to absurd places in logical ways. Through stellar performances and writing that lays foundations for the twists rather than rushing into them, it makes sense of pantomime plots. By the end of Season 4, the depth of Frank and Claire's immorality is completely off the scale, but believable. They still make being bad so very good to watch.

OLLY RICHARDS

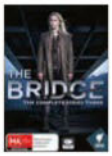
The Bridge: S3

★★★★★

FROM **APRIL 6** / RATED **MA15+** / CREATOR **HANS ROSENFELDT** / CAST **SOFIA HELIN, THURE LINDHARDT, DAG MALMBERG, KIRSTEN OLESEN**

DVD

NOT A BRIDGE TO FAR



IT'S BEEN THIRTEEN months since emotionally chilly Swedish supercop Saga Norén had her best friend (and fellow officer) arrested on charges of murder, so it's hardly surprising she's persona non grata amongst her work colleagues. When a Danish citizen is found murdered on a Swedish building site she's assigned the case, eventually teaming up with Henrik, a bed-hopping Danish cop who actually seems to want to work with the notoriously socially awkward detective. The murder has both heavy political overtones — the victim was a gay rights campaigner who opened Denmark's first gender-neutral child-care facility — and proves to be only the first in a series: will the pair be able to track down the killer(s) when the list of suspects just keeps on growing?

There are three elements that make *The Bridge* a stand-out amongst the current run of Scandi-noir dramas. The first is the setting, an endless backdrop of bleak wintry landscapes and cosy houses perfect for evil to lurk in. The second is the plot, which moves forward at a rapid rate churning through possible suspects without any of the twists feeling arbitrary. What is the connection between the murders and a right-wing blogger? Why is the murderer arranging the bodies to resemble perfect happy families? What's the story with Henrik's family? And what happens when the police investigation turns on Saga?


The Saga continues.

The third element is Saga herself, whose lack of social skills and connections (the show's creators refuse to nail down exactly why she's so socially awkward and fixated on her work, though this season delves deeper into her past with the arrival of her estranged mother) is highlighted by the constant focus on families, dysfunctional and otherwise. Seeing her struggle to make connections even when she can't see the need is strangely touching; seeing her crumble from the pressure she's under is heartbreaking.
EXTRAS None.
ANTHONY MORRIS



Game Of Thrones: S5

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+**

DVD BR

This most magnificently base fantasy opera reached new extremes in S5 (spoilers!): a cracking battle between Wildlings and the undead in ep 8, the horrible rape of young Sansa Stark by odious Ramsay Bolton, Stannis's awful filicide, Cersei's naked public humiliation at the hands of religious sect The Sparrows, Daenerys's displacement, the treacherous murder of series' hunk, Arya's crippling error – Cripes! The disparate narrative for which the show has become famous has reached tether's end trying to give enough weight to events and characters; a feat managed, just. Still bewitching, still gut-wrenching, still dazzling, the fraying edges will hopefully tighten in S6.
EXTRAS Deleted scenes, more. DM



The Shannara Chronicles: S1

★★★☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+**

DVD BR

Terry Brooks's fantasy series *Shannara* is largely a straightforward *The Lord Of The Rings* clone, which should have made a television adaptation fairly simple. This visually impressive series based on the second *Shannara* novel does keep chunks of Brooks's work intact. But it stirs in teen romance and muddled plots when a perfectly decent fantasy story (three heroes, guided by The Last Druid, must save a magical tree that prevents demons from overwhelming the Four Lands) is right there for the taking. It improves as it goes on but only at the end does it become a truly epic experience.
EXTRAS Cast interviews.
AM



Fear The Walking Dead: S1

★★★☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+**

DVD BR

With *The Walking Dead* delivering beaucoup eyeballs on U.S. cable TV, a spin-off/world expansion was inevitable. *Fear The Walking Dead* begins in the month *TWD*'s Rick spends in a coma, from initial outbreak, in bustling L.A. rather than rural Georgia. And while it doesn't deliver *World War Z* bird's-eye pandemonium as hoped, a top-notch ensemble provide nuanced depth to the human mayhem and intra-family drama as Travis (Cliff Curtis) and Madison (Kim Dickens) lead their broken-Brady Bunch through societal collapse, uneasy suburban quarantine by the U.S. Army and societal collapse (reprise). A worthy companion for fans and a solid introduction for noobs.
EXTRAS Two featurettes. DM

Jack Irish: S1

★★★☆☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **MA15+** / CREATORS **ANDREW ANASTASIOS, MATT CAMERON, ANDREW KNIGHT** / CAST **GUY PEARCE, MARTA DUSSELDORP**

DVD BR

TO BE SURE



THE RECEIVED WISDOM IN this now-crested Golden Age Of Television is that more time will improve any narrative: once expanded from a feature length to several episodes/seasons, the characters are fleshed, the audiences marinate. The case for *Jack Irish* is a strong one — three quality TV-movies possessing cracking yarns, an endearing host of colourful characters led by a megawatt film star as Irish (Guy Pearce) and Australia's most bankable TV star (Marta Dusseldorp) as his paramour. So it's interesting that the first series splits them up (as it did in Peter Temple's book *White Dog*), sending Linda away to the Philippines in search of foreign correspondent Walkley glory, and Jack into a case involving missing persons and a charismatic church, led by Marcus Graham's enigmatic pastor. Terrorists, a masked sex party, a heartfelt affair and an elaborate horseracing sting with the inimitable Harry (Roy Billings) and Cam (Aaron Pedersen) keep things fizzing along well enough.


Beard envy.

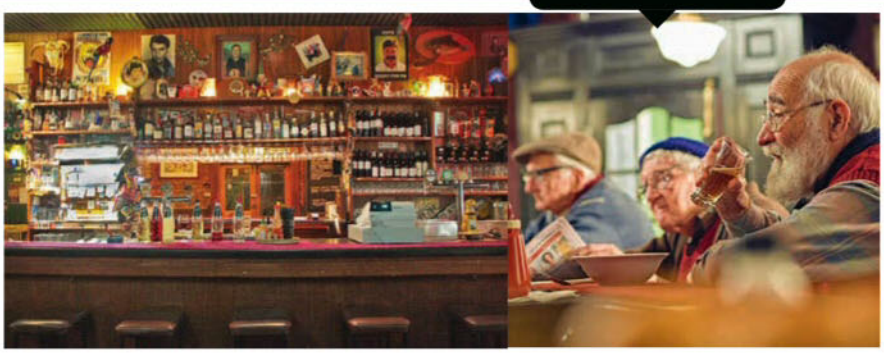
The ambition stretches thin as the narratives combine, moments of dialogue fall into atypical (for the series) cliché as the stakes are raised. Elements of the conspiracy at the story's heart stretch incredulity in the service of shock — one character's mauling to death by dogs, after she admits it's her greatest fear on an official video, seems an imprudent move for a clandestine criminal ring to make. That they play a similar trick on Jack is head-scratching.

This is an exacting assessment, for much of the show is involving and engaging. The world and characters created by Temple and writers Andrew Knight, Matt Cameron and Andrew Anastasios are so enjoyable the series wins on charm alone. S2 is a welcome near-certainty. And, if Guy's busy, perhaps a spin-off with Harry and Cam, with guest appearances from Deb Mailman and Shane Jacobson, whose Barry Tregear is the nice-guy actor at his deliciously darkest.

Or, you know, do both.

EXTRAS None. DANIEL MURPHY

BONUS FEATURE



IT'S A MELBOURNE THING

THE SOON-TO-BE-GENTRIFIED MEAN STREETS OF AUSTRALIA'S UNDERBELLY-EST CITY ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE APPEAL OF *JACK IRISH*

THE BRITS AND THE SCANDINAVIANS HAVE BEEN doing these geographic-specific, rumpled detective series with élan for nearly two decades now, so it is bizarre that Australia only has one that resonates so well with the audience, and it didn't arrive til 2012.

Not so surprising is its setting. Melbourne has become synonymous with a certain venal criminality and, in *Jack Irish*, its inner-city is indelible to the show's flavour, an expression of the title character's knocked-about charm, says co-producer Andrew Anastasios. "Because [*author Peter*] Temple had embedded Jack in Fitzroy, there was no doubt in our minds that Jack had to stay in inner-city Melbourne. It's important that Jack maintains that relationship with the suburb, but also the main characters: the Fitzroy Youth Club [*old blokes at the pub, above right*], the racing world with Roy [*Billing*] and Aaron [*Pedersen*]. They are a part of that old world of Melbourne. For Jack his inability to move on is embedded in that world."

And while the Prince Of Prussia pub isn't real (it's based on The Standard Hotel, see far left), lots of the scenery is. "One of the really exciting things about doing this show is going to parts of Melbourne I'd never been too," says Anastasios. "We try to stay on the grungy, dirty, not-so-seen side of Melbourne, in the underbelly, and it takes us to suburbs that are not necessarily like that but have that look and feel about them too."

Despite its regional specificity, *Jack Irish* has travelled well, the three feature-length TV movies doing decent business in the UK, Germany and the U.S.. They are currently on Netflix, while the series has been sold to Fox UK.

A native himself, the show's star is less sure Melbourne is the main draw. "It's probably very important but we don't really think of it," says Guy Pearce. "I'm just there in the world. I think it's more about being Australian than being about Melbourne as such. It all comes to the surface because we shoot it in Melbourne. We reference places for real – Moonee Valley, Fitzroy and so on. But you can create a 'real' fictitious place too. As long as the characters are real and believable, you'll buy that it's on Mars or in Fitzroy. [*But*] when you read the books you do get the flavour of Melbourne and the tone of the characters." DM

118

Love: S1

★★★☆☆

FROM **NOW** / CREATORS **JUDD APATOW, PAUL RUST, LESLEY ARFIN** / CAST **GILLIAN JACOBS, PAUL RUST, CLAUDIA O'DOHERTY**

N

ADULT EDUCATION



JUDD APATOW CO-CREATED this Netflix comedy about two thirtysomethings fumbling their way towards a possible relationship and in common with most Apatow projects, it's really about the terror of finding you've become a grown-up without ever learning how to actually do that.

Gillian Jacobs (*Community*) is Mickey, a radio manager whose default mood is mildly irritated and is under the influence of at least one stimulant. Paul Rust is supposed nice guy Gus, a tutor to a child star, who worries he'll screw up just about any social interaction, then does. They cross paths when both are at their lowest ebb and start hanging out, based on mutual attraction and co-dependence.

There are a lot of second-adolescence comedy shows around at the moment and it's hard to find anything *Love* does that isn't being done better elsewhere. It's not as funny or as bold as Netflix's similar *Master Of None*, which can do episodes about feminism or second-generation immigrant guilt without ever seeming "issue-y". And it can't match the dialogue of the slightly younger characters in *Girls* (also produced by Apatow). It's amusing, with Apatow's loose, let's-just-see-where-this-scene-goes style and strong support characters, but in a way that raises a smile rather than a laugh.

Then there's the core problem, which hopefully will be resolved in the already commissioned second season: we aren't given much reason to root for these two as a couple. Gus and Mickey don't seem especially well-matched and there appears little shortage of other options — by far the funniest episode sees Gus dating Mickey's roommate Bertie (Claudia O'Doherty, who could carry her own series as the optimistic Australian new to LA), so it's not as if they're each other's only shot. Also, Gus is pretty awful, and not just because he's the sort of person who goes to a party and starts playing a guitar uninvited. He's selfish and self-pitying. Mickey's no picnic, but at least owns her screw-ups. There's good stuff here, but it needs a stronger pull for the will-they-won't-they, otherwise there's no reason to care about the answer. **OLLY RICHARDS**



"Have you ever heard *Stairway To Heaven?*"



Rectify: S3

★★★★★

FROM **NOW** / RATED **M**

DVD BR

If Season 1 of this compelling existential drama followed the rebirth of Daniel (a remarkable performance from Aden Young), a middle-aged man suddenly free after 19 years on death row (paralleling Netflix smash *Making A Murderer*), S2 was his awkward entry into adolescence. Now in Season 3, finally, his complex journey into adulthood has reached its destination, or as close as he can get. It's a knotty, fraught and gently funny rite of passage for Daniel and his family and a fitting lead up to this year's final season. Powerful, poignant viewing.

EXTRAS: Inside The Episodes, Sundance On Set.

JIM MITCHELL

BONUS FEATURE

MYSTERY UNFOLDING

ADEN YOUNG ON PLAYING THE ENIGMATIC DANIEL IN *RECTIFY*

Daniel is such an intense role. Are are you able to leave him on set once the cameras stop rolling?

No, but I've found a way to deal with him. Metaphorically, I've built a guest house. He can come home but he has to stay in the guest house because he's quite damaged and he doesn't understand when he's not needed.

In Season 3 it's still not clear if Daniel is responsible for the murder at the centre of the story's mystery...

And once you put that alongside the reality that Daniel was tripping on mushrooms [*laughs*] well, you've got a very foggy picture to draw any truth from. It is a mystery and it is an incredibly complex mystery to delve into.

Are you let in on where the mystery is headed as you're shooting?

With the first series it began with a question to Ray [*creator Ray McKinnon*]. I said 'Are you gonna tell me whether or not Daniel is guilty?' and he asked me 'Would you like to know?' [*laughs*]. So it began an experiment of, in not knowing, what can I bring to the character? With Season 3, at first I said to Ray 'I don't want to know anything about the story arc of the season. I'm just gonna go with Daniel for the journey and explore as he explores. It became a very difficult process because it meant very quickly learning the lines as if they were almost text from a phone book.

And you actually turned the role down at one point?

It's just a stroke of fate that I happened upon the script when I did because I had always been in love with the cinema and I was never in love with doing a contractual piece of television. But here was an opportunity to do something that was akin to cinema but also in which the character wasn't constrained by the procedural elements of what factory farming television had been for so many years. Now there was an opportunity to have a character whose arc was the story. **JM**





Quantum Leap: S1

★★★★☆

FROM **NOW** / RATED **PG**

DVD BR

A giant step for mainstream sci-fi television in 1989, *Quantum Leap* sold its brilliant central conceit on winning performances by Scott Bakula as Dr. Sam Beckett and Dean Stockwell as hologram Al. In each episode Sam "leaps" to a new time, waking in someone else's body with no idea who or where or when he is. Bakula and Stockwell are a fabulous odd couple, ensuring potential cheesiness is usurped with wit and style. It's dated yes, but *Quantum Leap* stands the test of time.
EXTRAS Introductions, interviews, more. **DMB**



The Wonder Years: Complete Collection

★★★★☆

FROM **APRIL 20** / RATED **M**

BR

Revolutionary for its single-camera style and lack of a laugh track, *The Wonder Years* rethought the traditional family comedy throughout its six-year run, following Kevin Arnold (a charming Fred Savage) through his formative years in white picket fence-lined suburban America during the late-'60s. With a standout ensemble cast, easily digestible sitcom character tropes and adolescent antics, each episode leaves you craving more. The show capitalises on nostalgia and embraces the universality of youth, allowing us to relive our own simultaneously joyous and humiliating wonder years.
EXTRAS Cast reunion, featurettes, more.
JOHANNA GRUBER

"OH BOY!"

SCOTT BAKULA STEPS BACK IN TIME TO DISCUSS *QUANTUM LEAP*

INTERVIEW BY **DAVID MICHAEL BROWN**

You were a budding young actor when you got the part of Sam...
Yes, at that time I was happy to get an audition for anything. [*Laughs*] It wasn't like I could pick and choose. Certainly Bellisario [*producer Donald Paul Bellisario*] had quite a reputation because of *Magnum P.I.*. The script that he wrote, the pilot script, the two hour script, was just magical and really intriguing to me, and I was very, very excited about the opportunity, the possibility of where it could lead.

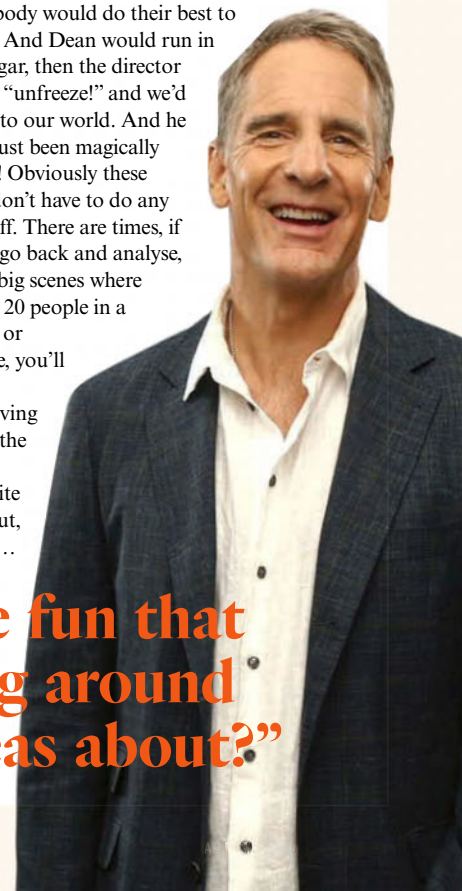
What better way to keep a role fresh over five seasons than playing someone different every episode that just happens to look like you...
Absolutely, no one ever really considered what the possibilities were going to be at the beginning. It was just, you know, like all things, you try to sell the pilot and then you kind of figure it out after that. All of a sudden, we got into it, and just because of who I am and how I was raised and all these kind of different things that I had dabbled in as a kid, we just used every one of them, so it just expanded the possibilities. Music and sports, and all the things that I do and love. We just did one thing after another, it was limitless.

Do you have a favourite "Oh boy" moment?
Oh gosh! There were so many, they ran the gauntlet! One of my favourites was instead of "Oh boy," I got to say "Oy vey, I'm a rabbi," that was funny. A lot were funny but we did get serious. Looking into the mirror and realising that you're Lee Harvey Oswald, or a rape victim about to testify, or you're an elderly African American man in the '50s in the deep South, those were emotional things to play. Can you imagine the fun that the writers had just kicking those ideas around every week?

Were you ever shocked reading the scripts?
Not shocked. But sometimes they called for me to do some amazing things that pushed my physical limits. I remember getting the script for the trapeze circus episode, and I just really felt like the writers were trying to kill me. I have a small inner ear problem, so to be hanging upside down on a trapeze all day long and shooting a show it was like torture. When I was a chimpanzee they put me in the centrifugal force machine. I was spinning around. I remember those things being very unpleasant.

You had a great on-screen chemistry with Dean Stockwell...
Dean was a genius — is a genius — and he was so smart and clever and seasoned as an actor, and shared and was so enthusiastic. He taught me so much about being on a set and how to be consistent and be there. And he had a great sense of humour. He had the best job in Hollywood because he worked about two days out of every episode and he was just learning how to play golf at the time, so he was on the golf course. He'd call us and say "Can you slow down, I'm on the 16th, I need to finish these last two holes." But he used to walk in the back door, you'd hear him coming in the stage and he'd yell, "The fun starts now!" I love him. I was so fortunate to get to work with him. And the show was unique because of him.

How do you think *Quantum Leap* would fare in this new age of television?
Well the effects would be better. Back in the day the director would yell "freeze!" and everybody would do their best to stand still. And Dean would run in with his cigar, then the director would yell "unfreeze!" and we'd go back into our world. And he would've just been magically popped in! Obviously these days you don't have to do any of that stuff. There are times, if you really go back and analyse, especially big scenes where you've got 20 people in a restaurant or somewhere, you'll always see people moving around in the back. It doesn't quite hold up, but, you know…



"Can you imagine the fun that the writers had sitting around just kicking those ideas about?"

"A vivid mix of violent poetry and gallows humour."

Blue Murder

1995 / OUT **NOW** / RATED **MA15+** / CREATORS **IAN DAVID, MICHAEL JENKINS** / CAST **RICHARD ROXBURGH, TONY MARTIN, STEVE BASTONI, GARY SWEET, PETER PHELPS**

DVD

TRUER DETECTIVE

WORDS **MICHAEL ADAMS**

THESE DAYS WATCHING *BLUE Murder* is as easy as clicking 'buy' on iTunes or buying the DVD. Twenty years ago, though, things weren't so simple for those who lived on the mean streets where it was set. With the real-life Arthur 'Neddy' Smith still before the courts on murder charges, the Supreme Court ruled that the explosive ABC-TV series depicting the cops and crooks who ran Sydney in the 1970s and '80s couldn't be screened in NSW or the ACT. So, between 1995 and the lifting of the injunction in 2001, the only way to see the show was, aptly, to get your hands a bit dirty by borrowing a VHS taped off ABC broadcasts in other states.

The illicit effort was well worth it. *Blue Murder* was TV the likes of which we'd never seen in Australia before. Gritty, stylish and smart, it stormed way past criminal charges beaten in court to lay out its own all-too-credible convictions about who'd committed some of Sydney's most cold-blooded murders.

Opening in 1976, a frenetic camera catches Neddy and crew botching an armed robbery, which thrusts him into the orbit of Detective-Sergeant Roger 'The Dodger' Rogerson. With this smirking avatar of police corruption calling the shots, Smith and his cohort of knuckle- and trigger-happy crims are soon getting rich on a rampage of armed robbery and drug distribution. But when young hothead Warren Lanfranchi goes too far by pulling a gun on a uniform, he's executed by Rogerson with Smith's connivance. Staying staunch earns Neddy the infamous "green light" — criminal carte blanche that effectively puts him above the law. But this empire of corruption starts to crumble when they conspire to carry out a hit on Mick Drury, a drug cop who refuses to be bribed.



Tony Martin as Arthur "Neddy" Smith. Just one of the utterly immersive performances in *Blue Murder*.



Doomed lovers Warren Lanfranchi (Alex Dimitriades) and Sally-Anne Huckstepp (Loene Carmen).



Richard Roxburgh as Roger 'The Dodger' Rogerson: "There may never have been a more indelible biographical performance."

Based on *In The Line Of Fire* by Darren Goodsir (now editor-in-chief of *The Sydney Morning Herald*), the autobiography *Neddy* by Smith and Tom Noble, and various confessions, briefs and bits of scuttlebutt, this two-parter is as electrifyingly entertaining today as it was on release. Director Michael Jenkins (*Scales Of Justice*, *Wildside*) weds the intimacy and urgency of handheld camera with a jazzy score for a vibe that's both docudramatic and cinematic.

But Jenkins's true triumph is in the uncanny performances he elicits. Right down to his initials, the rubbery faced Richard Roxburgh is the dead-spit of the gimlet-eyed Rogerson, a man who makes the term of endearment "sunshine" conjure very dark clouds and whose head-back guffaw is even more chilling. There may never have been a more indelible biographical performance on Australian television. That said, Tony Martin runs a close second as Neddy, the not terribly bright thug elevated to criminal royalty by his cringing fealty to his cop overlord. His alternately simpering and strident performance, made even more complex as the character is diagnosed with Parkinson's, is nothing short of astounding. Together, they're a hugely watchable and re-watchable deadly double act, offset superbly by Steve Bastoni's soft-spoken unshakeability as decent cop Drury. The other supports are all awesome, including Bill Hunter's bellowing police boss Black Angus, Alex Dimitriades firebrand Lanfranchi, Peter Phelps's hard-man Graham "Abo" Henry, Gary Sweet as Christopher Dale Flannery, aka Mr. Rent-A-Kill, and Loene Carmen as Lanfranchi's tragic girlfriend Sallie-Anne Huckstepp.

As fine as they are, the actors are blessed by Ian David's brilliant script, which, though muscular with major set pieces, has as its connective tissue character interactions that are a vividly quotable mixture of grasping desperation, violent poetry and Aussie gallows humour. Kings Cross, complains The Dodger, teems with "Junkies, drunks and busted-up sluts", while Neddy describes Abo as a "big strong bastard who stuck to you like shit to a blanket". The dialogue and multiple voice-overs are delivered with wonderful rhythms and the dark comedy created when understatement is juxtaposed with terrible brutality. There's everything terrifying about Neddy and his thugs sending a crooked lawyer to the bottom of the ocean chained to a stove. But there's also something undeniably funny about the sinister good cheer with which it's done ("Early Kooka, mate, don't make 'em like they used to!") before the coup de grace reminds us of just who these guys are and what they've just done ("See ya later, c**t"), only for Aussie matter-of-factness to reassert itself as the killers sip stubbies and admire the view like mates on a fishing trip. That so many terrible crimes are planned over ciggies and longnecks at backyard BBQs, city pubs and Chinese restaurants make *Blue Murder* seems a little like a forerunner to *The Sopranos*. The devil might live next door to you in the suburbs rather than in some Coppola-esque Mafioso mansion. Hell, like Rogerson, he might even wear a cardigan.

With The Dodger back in homicidal hot water as we go to print, could Roxburgh, Jenkins and David be tempted with a sequel? As Neddy might say, "Can something be done mate, can something be done?" Green light it, already.



WIN! *Fargo*: S2 on Blu-ray

THE FRIENDLIEST OF PEOPLE COMBINED WITH THE most heinous of crimes. This pitch black, Coen inspired comedy continues into Season 2, following the gory events that unfold in the small, ice-covered town of Fargo, North Dakota. Aw, heck! We just want you to win one of 10 Blu-ray copies we have up for grabs.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE *FARGO* MOMENT IS, AND WHY.

WIN! *The Shannara Chronicles* on DVD or Blu-ray

GNOMES AND TROLLS AND ELVES, OH MY! IF *THE* *Lord Of The Rings* and *Game Of Thrones* didn't sate your thirst for fantasy, we have 10 copies of the first season of *The Shannara Chronicles* to wet your whistle.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE MYTHICAL CREATURE, AND WHY.

WIN! *Banshee*: S3 on DVD or Blu-ray

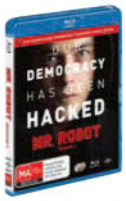
NOT TO BE MISTAKEN FOR THE SCREAMING BEASTS of folklore, Banshee is a fictional town where tumultuous characters get up to all sorts of shenanigans. Hopely watchable shenanigans if you bag one of 10 copies we have to win.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT FICTIONAL TV TOWN YOU WOULD LIVE IN, AND WHY.

WIN! *Mr. Robot* on Blu-ray

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED HACKING INTO THE NETWORKS OF SOME OF THE richest people in the world while attempting one of the biggest revolutions in history? If not, *Mr. Robot* may be your starting point for inspiration. Win one of 10 Blu-ray copies to get the ball rolling!



TO WIN, TELL US WHO IS YOUR FAVOURITE FICTIONAL TECH GENIUS, AND WHY.

WIN! *Homeland*: S5 on Blu-ray

IF GOVERNMENT CONSPIRACIES AND PEOPLE SCREAMING AT each other a lot is your kind of entertainment, then *Homeland* is what you need. Join Carrie and Saul as they battle, once again, with international controversy and government secrets. Uncover one of 10 BD copies.



TO WIN, TELL US YOUR FAVOURITE FAMOUS CONSPIRACY THEORY, AND WHY.

WIN! *Heroes Reborn* on DVD or Blu-ray

IF YOU WERE ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO COULDN'T bear to see *Heroes* end, then never fear! The genetically-enhanced individuals are back for some more suped-up escapades. See how heroic they get by winning one of 10 copies.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT SUPER POWER YOU'D LIKE TO HAVE, AND WHY.

WIN! *Haven: The Final Season* on DVD

THE FIFTH AND FINAL SEASON FOR *HAVEN* KICKS OFF WHERE last season ended: with everyone in trouble. Haven is no safe haven, especially if you live there. Luckily townsfolk have Audrey to save their bacon from William Shatner. Win one of 10 DVDs to see The Shat defeated.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE SUPERNATURAL CREATURE IS, AND WHY.

WIN! *Bloodline* on DVD

DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY DRAMA AT ITS PEAK! WHAT WILL THE Rayburn children do when their estranged older brother, played by Ben Mendelsohn, returns home accompanied by an extra-large order of emotional baggage? Win one of 10 copies of this tense Netflix drama to watch them crumble.



TO WIN, TELL US WHICH DEAD TV CHARACTER YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE BACK, AND WHY.

WIN! *The Frankenstein Chronicles* on DVD

SEAN BEAN STARS AS A POLICE INVESTIGATOR WHO, ERM, investigates the deaths of eight children when their sewn together body parts wash up on the shore of 19th century London. To see if this is one of the few times Bean doesn't die on screen, score one of 10 DVDs.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE SEAN BEAN ROLE IS, AND WHY.

HOW TO ENTER

To win any of these prizes, email us at empiregiveaways@bauer-media.com.au, write the prize in the subject line, your preferred format if there are both DVD or Blu-ray options and complete the answer in 25 words or less, not forgetting to include your contact details. All competitions are open to both Australian and New Zealander Empire readers. Entries close April 28, 2016. For conditions of entry visit www.bauer-media.com.au/terms/competition-terms

EMPIRE TV
CLASSIC SCENE



Happy Days: Hollywood (Part 3) (S5, Ep 3) 1977

"HE'S READY TO MAKE THE JUMP!"

SETTING THE SCENE "Jumping the shark" has come to define the moment a sitcom crests its apex thanks to an outlandish twist in the plot (to maintain a sense of wonder). The phrase was born with this climax of "Hollywood (Part 3)", a Season 5 episode of the huge 1970s hit *Happy Days*. It went like this: After breaking down in Milwaukee, two Hollywood producers require the help of local mechanic, Arthur 'Fonzie' Fonzarelli (Henry Winkler). After charming the producers with his charismatic personality, he is invited to Hollywood, taking the whole *Happy Days* gang to California. There they meet 'The California Kid' (James Daughton), who challenges Fonzie to a shark-jumping, water-skiing stunt, which The Fonz does in his leather jacket, as Richie Cunningham (Ron Howard) drives the boat. Schyeah. *Happy Days* would trundle on for six more seasons and a legend was created.

EXT. CALIFORNIAN HARBOUR

A crowd watches as Richie drives a speedboat pulling Fonzie on his waterskis, towards a ramp positioned before a ringed enclosure containing a shark..

Joanie Cunningham (Erin Moran): He's still gonna do it!

Cuts to the crowd; the Cunninghams (Tom Bosley, Marion Ross); Ralph Malph (Donny Most) and Potsie Weber (Anson Williams) and friends; the shark, circling in the pool. Richie turns to Fonzie.

Richie Cunningham: Here we go Fonz; I'm heading for the ramp. Are you sure you want to do it?

Fonzie signals thumbs up.

Ralph Malph: Look at that shark, Pots!

Potsie: Yeah!

Ralph Malph: How could you accept the challenge?

Potsie: It wasn't me, it was you!

Ralph Malph hangs head in shame.

Ralph Malph: (*Crying*) I know. I know.

Potsie: It's okay, Ralph, it's okay.

Joanie: He's really going to do it!

Potsie: He's ready to make the jump!

Crowd watches attentively.

Ralph Malph: There he goes!

Fonzie leaps off the ramp and over the shark, sticking the landing. The crowd cheers. As the boat pulls around to the beach, Fonzie skis onto the sand and strides out of his waterskis in one movement. The jubilant crowd runs to congratulate The Fonz.



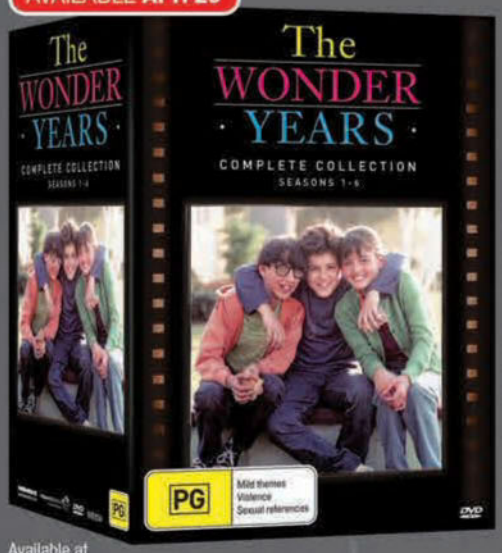
LIKE THIS, WATCH THIS

THE SIMPSONS: GUMP ROAST S13, EP17

(2002)

Television's finest Po-Mo cultural bowerbirds, *The Simpsons* pay homage to the shark-jump in an episode where Homer is roasted by The Springfield Friars Club, one of Matt Groening and Co.'s winking "Don't call it a clip show" clip shows.

AVAILABLE **APR 20**



The WONDER YEARS

For six seasons, The Wonder Years captured the angst of growing up in suburban middle- class America in the late '60s, as seen through the life and times of Kevin Arnold (Fred Savage). Audiences eagerly followed his evolution as a typical teenager who remembered every moment of his transition from childhood with excruciating detail and remarkable hindsight.

This 26-DVD set contains all 115 episodes from all 6 seasons of The Wonder Years, plus an abundance of exclusive bonus material.

Includes over 280 songs as they appeared in original broadcasts!

Special Features

- The First Cast Reunion In 16 Years
- Interviews with the Creators, Cast & Crew
- 10 Newly-Produced Featurettes
- Never-Before-Seen Outtakes of Kevin & Winnie's First Kiss & Much More.



Available at SANITY JB HI-FI Target

AVAILABLE **APR 20**

TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL

Touched by an Angel - The Complete Collection for the first time brings you all 201 uplifting episodes from all 9 seasons in a magnificent 59-disc box set.

A trio of angels Monica (Roma Downey), Tess (Della Reese), and Andrew (John Dye) are dispatched from heaven with a special mission: to inspire people facing sometimes unseen crossroads in their lives. The angels' commitment to the quest and their eternal love for mankind is unquestioned. Often it is the journey, not the destination that reveals the true miracles of life.





Available at SANITY JB HI-FI



The Nanny

Comedienne Fran Drescher stars in her career-defining role as the street-smart Fran Fine, a down-on-her-luck diva with the face of a star and a voice out of Queens, who gets a second chance at life (and love) when she unexpectedly becomes the new nanny for a wealthy Broadway producers kids. With a uniformly perfect cast and truly witty dialogue, The Nanny caught the attention of millions of viewers around the world.

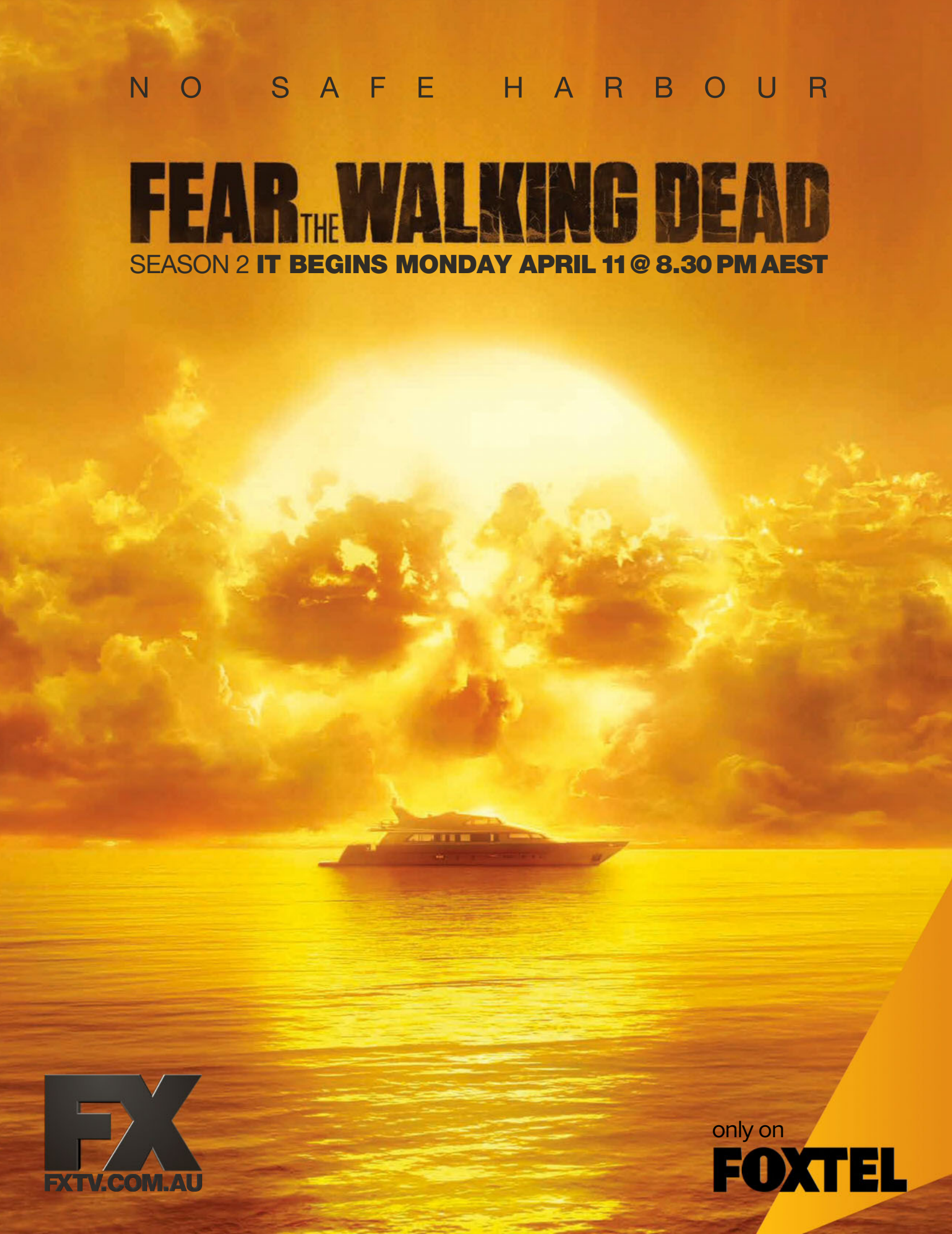


AVAILABLE **APR 6**

Available at JB HI-FI

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*While Stocks Last


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